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AMETHYST

THE STORY OF A BEAUTY

BY

CHRISTABEL R. COLERIDGE

AUTHOR OF

LADY BETTY, JACK O' LANTHORN, AN ENGLISH SQUIRE, ETC.

"My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a Soul: little else is worth study."
Note to *Sordello*, by ROBERT BROWNING.

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PART I.

THE STORY: AS IT BEGAN.

"When all the world was young, lad,
And all the trees were green."

81 EB 19 FEB '36

AMETHYST:

THE STORY OF A BEAUTY.

CHAPTER I.

A CHAMPAGNE LUNCHEON.

"WELL, my dear Annabel, very glad to see you. You don't often give me a chance of entertaining you. Come and have some luncheon; one can't talk business on an empty stomach."

"You're very good, Haredale. I wish my errand was a pleasanter one; but—"

"Well, we'll hear all about it directly. Champagne? Ladies always like champagne, so I provided some for you.—It's very good, it won't disagree with you."

Miss Annabel Haredale did not like champagne in the middle of the day, and thought that it was sure to disagree with her; but she smiled at her brother and took it like a martyr.

The scene was a rather shabbily appointed set of rooms in Duke Street, St. James's; in one of which an elegant little luncheon was laid for two. The actors were a lady and gentleman, both some years past fifty, both tall, with large well-marked

features, and reddish hair touched with grey. Both were unmistakably people of family and position, and to this air of high breeding the lady added that of personal worth. She looked like a good though not a clever woman; her brother, Lord Haredale, unfortunately, did not look like a good man. Their eyes, however, met with kindness, hers openly anxious, and his furtively so.

"And so you have given up the Twickenham villa and settled at Cleverley?" she said, after some surface conversation.

"Well, yes,—must economize, you know, and the old Admiral's lease of the Hall being out, it seemed convenient. My lady doesn't like it much; but she can leave the little girls down there, if she comes up to meet you and take out Amethyst. Of course she wants to present her; but it's confoundedly inconvenient this year."

"It is about Amethyst that I wish to speak to you," said Miss Haredale, strenuously refusing more champagne, and showing unmistakably her desire to proceed to business.

"What! you haven't found a chance already of settling her?"

"Oh no, no! she has seen no one. She has never been away from school. But, Haredale, a great misfortune has befallen me; so that I can no longer do by her as I could wish. I am a poor woman now, and it is for you to decide what you think right about her."

"Why! Deuce take it, have *you* been making ducks and drakes with your money?"

"No, but Farrant has done it for me. His brothers' bank has failed, the investments he advised have proved worthless. I shall hardly have £150 a year left—I have turned it over in my mind in every possible way—"

Lord Haredale had always felt that, however unlucky he might be himself, it was his sister's duty to the family to keep her few thousands safe; they had held a satisfactory place in his mind. He swore at the family lawyer for giving her bad advice, and confounded her folly in not looking more closely after her own affairs.

"I'm infernally sorry for you, Annabel," he said, when he had cooled down a little. "As you know, what with Charles's cursed extravagance, to say nothing of my lady's, I have nothing at command."

"I never supposed, for one moment, that you would have, Haredale," said his sister, emphatically. "Nor am I reduced to beggary. I can lessen my expenses. But if I do so, what can I do for Amethyst? Her life would be cut down to the narrowest limits. I could not possibly introduce her in London, which seems to me essential, in her position—all I had saved for the purpose is gone. I cannot tell you what it would cost me to resign the charge which I undertook. But of course you must decide for her as you think best."

"It's deuced bad luck," said Lord Haredale. "You see, I got my lady down to Cleverley, on the plea that she could come up for two or three weeks when you had Amethyst in town. But as to a London house, and bringing the girl out ourselves, it's impossible."

"In that case, she might wait another year; we might manage to keep her at school a year longer?" said Miss Haredale, anxiously.

"Ay, but you see," said Lord Haredale, "her mother tells me she's going to be a beauty."

"Yes, she is," said Miss Haredale, dejectedly.

"That alters the question. She might make a good match. You know my lady won't be jealous of her, and keep her back. That never was her way.

She treated Blanche like a sister—dressed her up to the nines on every occasion—though she wasn't her own child."

"If I thought that Blanche's story—" began Miss Haredale, vehemently.

"Blanche was a fool," said Lord Haredale, "she was born so. Perhaps Amethyst ain't."

"Amethyst is a good, high-minded girl, with plenty of sense. But she's as innocent as a child, and how do I know how she may turn out? Oh, Haredale, I came to tell you my trouble, and to offer her back, because I had promised that she should be brought out this year, and I felt that it was due to the family. I do care for the old name, Haredale, but I believe I am a worldly-minded woman. Let her grow a bit older, and then we shall see. Down with me, she'll be as fresh as a rose at twenty."

"Una will be coming on by that time; her mother wanted to bring her out now, the girls are getting too big to be about as children. No, if we're to have Amethyst on our hands, which of course is uncommon bad luck, we'd better take her at her best. Cleverley's not a bad neighbourhood —we could bring her out first in the country. I know her mother means to have her with her somehow this year. It won't do to let her be permanently on our hands, now you haven't the same prospect for her. You must see that, though how the deuce my lady will manage to get her frocks—"

"I'll keep her, Haredale," cried Miss Haredale, starting up. "I'll keep her, somehow. A London season and a fashionable marriage is not the end of existence. She shall not have to go through the misery of difficulties about dress and other things, which I knew only too well. I did not

know what I was doing in coming here. Don't expose her to all those shifts and contrivances!"

"You're upset, Anna," said Lord Haredale, "and no wonder!—By Jove! there's nothing so upsetting as losing money, especially when you've had nothing to show for it!"

"Can you wonder," said Miss Haredale, struggling with her feelings, "can you wonder that I shrink from exposing the child to—to so many temptations?"

"There's nothing to hurt her," said Lord Haredale easily. "She'll never come in Blanche's way; and Charles, curse him, never comes home at all. She'll be with people quite of your own sort at Cleverley. Of course we're quite aware of all you've done for her, I shouldn't think of taking her away from you, in any other case. But come down and talk the matter over with my lady. Capital train at 4.30. Come for a couple of nights and see for yourself. You'll find it all right enough for her. Come and see."

"Well, I shall at least hear what her mother thinks," said Miss Haredale, doubtfully; for in truth the mother was the chief subject of anxiety in her anxious mind. When eleven years before she had taken her niece to live with her, her object had been to make Amethyst's girlhood as unlike as possible to her own.

Thirty years or so ago, Annabel Haredale had been a fine distinguished-looking girl, popular in the fast and reckless set which frequented the family place, Haredale, in the last days of her father's life. Lord Haredale and his sons were racing men, and not at all particular as to which of their acquaintances they introduced to the family circle. All the men Annabel knew were fast and dissipated, and all the ladies of her set

tolerated, and even liked, fastness and dissipation. She had very little education, and all her religion consisted of an occasional attendance at Haredale church in a gallery with arm-chairs and a fire; where she and her visitors laughed and talked at intervals, and quizzed the natives. She was, however, a kind and warm-hearted girl, affectionate to her unworthy relatives, and she did her best, according to her lights, to keep matters straight at Haredale, and to preserve her own self-respect. She had many admirers, but no chance of marriage offered itself which she felt herself able to accept. The family circumstances did not improve when the old Lord Haredale died. His eldest son was equally deep in debt, and had less strength of character and constitution to carry off his vices. Annabel withdrew herself and her fortune, and, freed from the family surroundings, she came across people of a different stamp; another education began for her, she fell under religious influences, made good friends, and settled down happily into a pleasant and useful life at Silverfold, a pretty village not far from London.

She did what she could to keep up a kindly intercourse with her brother, and made much of his son and daughter, being indeed very fond of the somewhat unpromising boy whom she would fain have regarded as the hope of the family, and, when his mother died, she did all she could to show him kindness. Lord Haredale, however, married again almost immediately, a young beauty, who proved very uncongenial to her husband's sister.

When four little girls were added to the family, Miss Haredale had not much difficulty in getting the eldest put into her hands for education, and since then she had given Amethyst every advantage that she had missed herself.

The son and daughter of the first marriage had soon put themselves out of her reach, and were causes of increased difficulty and trouble. She had no reason to believe home life desirable for Amethyst, or to regret having removed her from its influence. The younger sisters were not so brought up as to make her think the mother—whose right over her child must needs be recognized—a wise guide for a beautiful girl. A kindly woman, without much strength of purpose, she had, spite of later influences, never quite outgrown the code of her youth, and it had never occurred to her as possible that her brother's daughter should not be "introduced" at eighteen in London, as she herself had been. She had felt it a duty, now that she could not herself give the girl this advantage, to let her have what opportunities her parents could give her.

And, though this interview showed her how much her standard had changed from that of her family, though she felt many misgivings as to the future, though she could not respect or trust her brother, even while she had never ceased to feel a fondness for him, she had not courage to fight the battle out; and when she finally consented to go with him to Cleverley to consult "my lady," she knew quite well that she had put the decision out of her own hands, and that Amethyst would enter on grown-up life under her mother's auspices.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE SHADE.

TWO days later, Miss Haredale came back from her visit to Cleverley, and reached her pretty cottage at Silverfold with a sad heart and many misgivings.

How gay the garden was, with its spring flowers, how successful her hyacinths and tulips, how comfortable her little drawing-room as she sat down by the fire! There would be no more little floral triumphs for her now, the cheerful home would be beyond her means, and her peaceful, useful life in it must be given up.

And Amethyst, who had been at her school during her aunt's absence, had still to be told of what had happened, of the new life in store for her. How could the fond aunt bring herself to tell her darling that their life together must end?

A rapid footfall came along the garden and across the hall, and Amethyst burst into the room.

"Auntie, auntie! The list has come from Cambridge.—And what do you think?"

As she dropped on her knees on the rug at her aunt's feet, waving a pamphlet before her eyes,

Miss Haredale looked at her, but in a preoccupied, inattentive way.

"What list, my dear?"

"What list, auntie! Why, the Cambridge Examination list, of course. And I'm in it! And I have a class—a second class; and, auntie—I'm 'distinguished in literature.' There! Oh the relief to one's mind! Did you ever know anything so delightful?"

"It won't make any difference, my dear, I'm afraid, to the trouble that has come upon us," said Miss Haredale, too deeply disturbed even to think of how she was dashing a pleasure, which seemed to her to bear little more relation to the realities of life than if Amethyst had shown her a new doll.

"What is the matter?" said the girl, startled. "Is anything wrong? Father—or mother?"

"No, my dear. But—but I have fallen into great misfortune; I would not tell you while there seemed a chance of its being a mistake. I hope I shall be enabled to bear it,—but it is more than I can face now."

"What—what, auntie?" cried Amethyst, pressing close to her aunt's knees and seizing the trembling hands clasped on them.

It took some talking and explaining before Amethyst could be made to comprehend the situation; but when she did understand how entirely the circumstances of their two lives were altered, her young soft face assumed a resolute expression. She stood up by the fireplace, and once more took the examination list in her hand.

"Auntie," she said, "it is very sad, of course, but it would have been much worse yesterday. *Now*, I don't think you need be anxious about me, at any rate. I am worth something now. I shall go to Miss Halliday; I think she will let me

have Miss Hayne's situation at St. Etheldred's. At least, I know that a girl, with so good a certificate as *this*, can always get employment. So, dear auntie, *I* can do for myself, and help you perhaps a little too."

"Be a school-teacher?" exclaimed Miss Haredale, in horror. "You, at your age! with your family, and your appearance!—Perfectly impossible."

"I could begin as a student-teacher, if I'm too young," said Amethyst coolly. "And it would be no disgrace to a princess to earn her living, if she was poor. And, as for looks,—it's a great advantage, auntie, to be rather nice-looking. It makes the girls like one."

"My dear, don't talk of it," said her aunt. "You have a right to the advantages and opportunities of other girls, and you *must* have them. Besides, it is settled otherwise."

"Of course," said Amethyst, "I should have liked the balls and everything very much. But I hope you don't think, dear auntie, that I'm such a selfish girl as to think of that when you are in trouble. Besides, if we can't afford them, it would be wrong of course to go in for them. I like teaching, I shouldn't be dull. There would be garden parties in the holidays. My cream muslin will do all this summer. And as for opportunities—if you mean about marrying—I'm sure, auntie, I've heard you say, over and over again, that if they are to come, they will come, wherever one may be. And if not—why, I can be quite happy as I am."

As the girl spoke, in her fresh cool young voice, Miss Haredale felt that her line of education had been very successful since Amethyst could think thus, and also that it was incumbent on Amethyst's guardians to think otherwise.

She did not much enjoy, nor greatly value beauty. She had deep reasons for distrusting the kind of beauty which Amethyst inherited. But she was perfectly aware that her young niece was beautiful, and that, whatever Amethyst might think at eighteen, the matter would look very different to her at eight and twenty.

"My dear," she said, "it can't be. Your parents would never consent, and you don't know what you are talking of. There's only one right thing to do. As I can no longer do my duty by you, or give you proper advantages, I—I—must give you up, and let you go home. Indeed, I have agreed to do so."

Miss Haredale turned her face away in the struggle to control her tears, so that she did not see the look that was not sorrow on Amethyst's face. But in another moment the girl's arms were round her neck.

"No—no, auntie," she said, "that would not be right at all. You often say how poor my father is for his position, and how he let me go because there were so many girls to provide for. It wouldn't be at all right for me to go back on his hands now, and to leave you in your trouble. I won't do it, auntie."

"My dear," said Miss Haredale, "you will be a great deal more on his hands if you don't get a chance of settling yourself. If only I knew better—if only I thought that all was as it should be! You are a dear good affectionate child, and I've kept you too innocent and ignorant. But you will be a good girl, Amethyst, wherever you may be. I am sure I could trust you."

"Oh yes, auntie, I think you could," said Amethyst, simply. "But I should be helped to be good if I went on at St. Etheldred's."

"I will talk to you presently," said Miss Haredale, after a tearful pause. "Run away, my darling, and leave me to compose myself."

Amethyst, with the despised list in her hand, went away into her own bedroom, and sat down by the window to think on her own account.

She had been taken from her home at seven years old, and since then, her intercourse with it had been confined to short visits on either side, and even these had ceased of late years, as Lord and Lady Haredale had lived much on the continent. She knew that her father's affairs were involved, that the heir, her half-brother, was in debt, and, as Miss Haredale put it, "not satisfactory, poor dear boy." She knew also that her half-sister, Lady Clyste, lived abroad apart from her husband, and that her own younger sisters had travelled about and lived very unsettled lives. But what all these things implied, she did not know at all. She thought her little-known mother the loveliest and sweetest person she had ever seen, and when she heard that her family were going to settle down for a time at a smaller place belonging to them not far from London, she had been full of hope of closer intercourse.

And now, the thought of going into society with her mother was full of dazzle and charm. She had had a very happy life. Her home with her aunt had been made bright by many little pleasures, and varied by all the interests of her education. The St. Etheldred's of which she had spoken was a girls' school in the neighbourhood of Silverfold, founded and carried on with a view to uniting the best modern education with strict religious principles. Amethyst and a few other girls attended as day scholars. She had been thoroughly well taught; her nature was susceptible to the best

influences of the place, and she was popular and influential with her school-fellows.

By far the prettiest girl in the school, among the cleverest, and the only one with any prestige of rank, she had grown up with a considerable amount of self-confidence. She did not feel herself ignorant of life, nor was she of the exclusive high-toned life in which she had been reared. She had helped to manage younger girls, she had been a very important person at St. Etheldred's, and she honestly believed herself capable of taking her aunt's burden on her shoulders and of carrying it successfully. She also thought herself capable of cheerfully sacrificing the gaieties of the great world for this dear aunt's sake. She felt quite convinced that work was a nobler thing than pleasure, and that a St. Etheldred's teacher would be happier than an idle young lady. She did not give in to her aunt's arguments. She was not so young and foolish as auntie supposed. She felt quite grown up, surely she looked so. She turned to the looking-glass to settle the point.

She saw a tall girl, slender and graceful, holding her long neck and small head with an air of dignity and distinction; which, nevertheless, harmonized perfectly with the simplicity and modesty of her expression. "Grown up," in her own sense she might be, but she had the innocent look of a creature on whom the world's breath had never blown; and though there was power in the smooth white brow, and spiritual capacity in the dark grey eyes, there was not a line of experience on the delicate face; the full red lips lay in a peaceful curve, and over the whole face there was a bloom and softness that had never known the wear and tear of ill-health, or ill feelings.

"I don't look like a child," she said to herself, "and I know so much more of the world than the girls who are always shut up in school, and never see a newspaper or read a novel. I should be fit for a teacher, I might go home for one season and be presented, if mother likes, and then come back and help auntie. I should like to know my sisters. It strikes me I do know very little about them all. Yes, I *should* like to go home."

Amethyst's eyes filled with tears, as a sudden yearning for the home circle from which she had been shut out possessed her. The affections of a child taken out of its natural place cannot flow in one smooth unbroken stream, and Amethyst felt that there was a contention within her. Her heart went out to the unknown home, and though she went down-stairs again, prepared to urge her scheme of self-help upon her aunt, it was already with a conscious sense of self-conquest that she did so.

Miss Haredale stopped the girl's arguments at once.

"No, my child, my mind is made up, and your parents' too. What you propose is perfectly out of the question. But, remember, you may always come back to me, I will always make some sort of home for you if you really need it, and you will try to be a good girl; for—for I don't like all I hear of fashionable life. There will be great deal of gaiety and frivolity."

"But mother will tell me what is right," said Amethyst. "I can always ask her, and I'll always do what she thinks best."

"Oh, my dear child," cried Miss Haredale, with agitation inexplicable to Amethyst, "no earthly guide is always enough."

"Of course I know that," said Amethyst, simply,

and with surprise. "But I can't go away from that other guidance, you know, auntie. That is the same everywhere. If one really wishes to know what is right, there is never any doubt about it. There is always a way out of a puzzle at school; and of course things there *are* sometimes puzzling."

The words were spoken in the most matter-of-course way, as by one who believed herself to have found by experience the truth of what she had been constantly taught, and who did not suppose that any one else could doubt it.

Miss Haredale said nothing; but whether rightly or wrongly, she never gave Amethyst a clearer warning, or more definite advice than this.

CHAPTER III.

NEIGHBOURS.

MARKET CLEVERLEY was a dull little town, within easy reach of London, but on another line from Silverfold. The great feature of its respectable old-fashioned street was the high-built wall and handsome iron gates of Cleverley Hall, a substantial house of dark brick of the style prevalent in the earlier part of the last century. Nearly opposite the Hall was the Rectory, smaller in size, but similar in age and colour; and, beyond the large, long, square-towered church which stood at the end of the street, were the fields and gardens of Ashfield Mount, a large white modern villa built on a rising ground, which commanded a view of flat, fertile country, and of long, white roads, stretching away between neatly trimmed hedges.

The exchange of the dull but innocuous Admiral and Mrs. Parry, at Cleverley Hall, for a large family of undoubted rank and position, who were supposed to be equally handsome and ill-behaved, and to belong to the extreme of fashion, could not fail to be exciting to the mother of two growing girls, and of a grown-up son, whose good looks and fair fortune were not to be despised. Mrs. Leigh rented Ashfield from the guardian uncle of the

owner, Miss Carisbrooke, a girl still under age, and had lived there for many years. Her son's place, Toppings, in a northern county, had been let during his long minority.

She was a handsome woman, still in early middle life, and, having been long the leader of Cleverley society, naturally regarded so formidable a rival as Lady Haredale with anxiety. She was indeed so full of the subject, that when Miss Margaret Riddell, the rector's maiden sister, came to see her for the first time, after a three months' absence abroad, she had no thoughts to spare for the climate of Rome, or the beauty of Florence; but began at once on the subject of the sudden arrival of the owners of Cleverley Hall, and the change from the dear good Parrys.

"Have you called there yet?" said Miss Riddell, as the two ladies sat at tea in the pleasant, well-furnished drawing-room at Ashfield Mount.

"Yes," said Mrs. Leigh, "but Lady Haredale was out. Three great tall girls came late into church on Sunday, handsome creatures, but not good style. Gertie and Kate are very eager about them, of course, but I shall be cautious how I let them get intimate."

"But what is the state of the case about the Haredales? What has become of the first family?"

"Well, my cousin in London, Mrs. St. George, tells me that Lord Haredale is supposed to be very hard up; ill luck on the turf I fancy, and the eldest son's debts. He, the son, is a shocking character, drinks I believe. But my cousin thinks his father very hard on him. Then Lady Clyste, the first wife's daughter, does not show at all—lives on the continent. Sir Edward is in India; but everybody knows that there was a great scandal, and a separation."

"Well, they both seem pretty well out of the way, at any rate."

"Yes, but it is this Lady Haredale herself. There's nothing definite against her, Louisa says, but she belongs to the very fastest set! And these children have knocked about on the continent; and at Twickenham, where they have had a villa, they were always to be seen with the men Lady Haredale had about, and, in fact, chaperoning their mother.—A nice training for girls!"

"Poor little things!" said Miss Riddell. "Perhaps this is their first chance in life."

"I dislike that style of thing so very much," said Mrs. Leigh; "with my girls I cannot be too particular."

Miss Riddell knew very well that this sentence might have been read, "with my boy I cannot be too particular;" and she was herself concerned at the report of the new-comers, though, being a woman of a kindly heart, she thought with interest and pity of the handsome girls, with their bad style—the result evidently of a bad training.

"I must go and call—of course," she said.

"Oh, of course—and I hope you and the Rector will come to meet them, we must have a dinner-party for them as soon as possible. Besides, it is time that Lucian came forward a little, if he is so shy when he goes back to Lancashire, he will make no way at all in his own county."

Miss Riddell's reply was forestalled by the entrance of the subject of this remark, who came up and shook hands with her cordially, but with something of the stiff politeness of a well-bred school-boy.

"Ah, you hear what I say, Lucian," said his mother, "there are several things in store for you, which I do not mean to let you shirk in your usual fashion."

"But I don't want to shirk, if you are asking the Rector and Miss Riddell to dinner," said the young man. "I'm very glad to see you back again, Miss Riddell; and if I must take in this formidable Lady Haredale, you'll sit on the other side—won't you?—and help me to talk to her?"

"I fancy from what I hear that you won't find that difficult," said Miss Riddell, "or disagreeable; but, if you like, I will report on her after my first visit."

"Ah, thanks—give me the map of the country beforehand. Syl coming down this Easter?"

"I think so, for a week or two," said Miss Riddell, as she took her leave. "Come some day soon, and see my Italian photographs; you know you are always welcome."

"I will," said Lucian; "the mother can't say I shirk coming to see you."

"No, Lucian, I have no fault to find with you. You know I always take your part. Good-bye for the present."

Miss Riddell watched him as he walked away down the garden whistling to his dog—a tall fair youth, handsome as a young Greek, possessing indeed a kind of ideal beauty, that seemed almost out of character in the simple good-hearted boy who loved nothing so well as dogs and horses, liked to spend all his days in the roughest of shooting-coats, was too shy to enjoy balls and garden-parties (since he had never found out that he might have been the most popular of partners), and except on the simplest topics, in the home circle, or with his old friend Sylvester Riddell, never seemed to have anything to say. He was not clever, and cared little for intellectual interests, but he had managed to get himself decently through the Schools, and never seemed to have found it difficult to behave well.

His mother often declared herself disappointed that he did not make more of himself; but Miss Riddell wondered if there was much more to make.

She was interested in him, however, for ever since she had come to live with her widowed brother, the young people of the neighbourhood had formed one of the great interests of her life; and it was with every intention of giving a kindly welcome to the new-comers, that she set out on the next day to call on Lady Haredale. Within the wrought-iron gates of Cleverley Hall, a short straight drive led up to the house, defended by high cypress hedges, cut at intervals into turrets and pinnacles, troublesome to keep in order, and sombre and peculiar in effect. Miss Riddell wondered what the fashionable family would think of them. She was shown into a long drawing-room, where a tall slim figure rose to receive her, and three tall children started up from various parts of the room.

Lady Haredale was girlishly slight and graceful. She seemed to have given her daughters their delicate outlines and pale soft colouring, neither dark nor fair; but as Miss Riddell watched the manner and expression of the four, it seemed to her that the mother's was much the simpler, and less affected; while she looked almost as youthful, and much more capable of enjoyment than her daughters. She was dressed in a shabby but becoming velvet gown, which told no tale of extravagance or of undue fashion.

"You know, Miss Riddell," she said presently, in a sweet cheerful voice, "we are supposed to come here to be economical. This is our retreat. These children are getting too big to be dragged about on the continent. Aren't they great girls? I have

had them always with me. Now we ought to shut them up in the school-room."

"Have they a governess?" asked Miss Riddell.

"Why—not at present. You see there wasn't money enough both for education and frocks—and I'm afraid I chose frocks," said Lady Haredale, with a voice and smile that almost made Miss Riddell feel that frocks were preferable to education.

"They have some time before them," she said.

"Poor little penniless things," said Lady Haredale, with a light laugh. "They haven't any time to waste. This creature—come here, Una—is really fifteen."

"I hope we shall soon be good friends," said Miss Riddell, kindly.

"Oh, thanks, you're very good, I'm sure," said Una, with a cool level stare out of her big eyes and an indifferent drawl in her voice.

"They want some friends," said Lady Haredale. "But this is not my eldest. There's Amethyst. Her aunt has brought her up, and kept her always at school. But now we're going to have her back. She's a very pretty child it seems to me."

"Is she coming to you soon?" asked Miss Riddell.

"After Easter. At her school they don't like going out in Lent," said Lady Haredale, opening her eyes, and speaking as if keeping Lent was a Japanese custom recently introduced. "She's been *so* well brought up by good Miss Haredale. But now she is eighteen, and it's time to take her out. The fact is, her aunt has had money losses—the last person among us who deserved them—but none of us ever have any money! She has been down here, poor woman, with Lord Haredale, to settle about it all."

"She feels parting with her niece, no doubt."

"Oh yes, dreadfully. But of course we shall let Amethyst go to her constantly. I'm so grateful to her for bringing her up. I hope the child will rub along with us comfortably. We shall have a few people staying with us soon; and while we are down here we must get these children taught something—they can do nothing but gabble a little French and German. Amethyst is finished, she has passed one of these new examinations. I hardly know what they are—but we left all that to her aunt, of course," concluded Lady Haredale, with a slight tone of apology. "And I think she's too pretty to be a blue."

"I hope she will find Cleverley pleasant," said Miss Riddell as she rose to take leave.

"I'm sure she will," said Lady Haredale sweetly and cordially, as she shook hands with her guest. "Of course we shall do our best to enjoy ourselves while we are in retreat. Though I don't mind confessing to you that I detest the country."

"She looks innocent enough," thought Miss Riddell as she walked away. "Silly I should say—but a real beauty."

"That woman's more frumpish than Aunt Annabel," said one of the girls as the door closed behind the visitor.

"Just her style, dear good creature," said Lady Haredale. "But they're the *Cheshire* Riddells, you know, my dear—quite people to be civil to."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOME CIRCLE.

LADY HAREDALE was naturally gifted with peculiarly even, cheerful spirits. She had a great capacity for enjoyment, though she had troubles enough to break down a better woman. She had married at seventeen a man much older than herself, already in embarrassed circumstances. Her step-children both disliked her, and had given her very good cause to dislike them.

She had four nearly portionless girls of her own to marry, and she herself had endless personal anxieties and worries, springing alike from want of money and from want of principle. Truly she had often not the wherewithal to pay for her own and her daughters' dress. She did not mind being in debt because it was wrong, but she found it very disagreeable. She belonged to a circle of ladies who played cards, and for very high stakes. That led to complications. She was a beauty and had many admirers, with whom she liked to maintain sentimental relations, and she was just really sentimental enough not always to stop at the safe point. Very uncomfortable trains of circumstances had arisen from the indulgence of this taste; and,

if she had had no regrets or difficulties of her own, Lord Haredale's character and pursuits would have given her plenty. Nor had she outer interests or resources in herself. She never realized, she seemed scarcely to have heard of all the various forms of philanthropy which are furthered by so many ladies of position. She did not care for politics, literature, or art. She was probably conscious of being much more charming than most of the women who occupied themselves with these interests; but on the whole it was rather that she did not know anything about them, than that she set herself against them. As for religion, she was really hardly conscious of its claims upon her beyond an occasional attendance at church, and due consideration for the social rank of a bishop. In such unconsciousness rather than opposition Lady Haredale was behind and unlike her age; but the state of mind may still be found, where dense perceptions and exclusive habits co-exist.

Yet she was always ready for a fresh amusement; she enjoyed gossip of a piquant and scandalous nature; she greatly enjoyed admiration, and treading on social white ice. When none of these excitements were at hand, she liked realistic novels, and comfortable chairs, and good things to eat and drink. She also liked her little girls, though she took very little trouble about them; and, though it cannot be denied that Satan did find some mischief for her idle heart and brain, if not for her idle hands to do, he did not often manage to lower her spirits or ruffle her temper. She not only did what she liked—what is less common, she liked what she did.

But her young daughters did not inherit this cheery serenity. They had no intelligent teaching, no growing enthusiasms to occupy their minds, and

they were inconceivably ignorant and *bornées*. They were entirely unprincipled, using the word in a negative sense, and they had not their mother's steady health. They had knocked about, abroad and at home, with careless servants, and foreign teachers. They had been to children's balls, and had been produced in picturesque costumes at grown-up entertainments; till, lacking their mother's spirit, they were apt to look on cynically, while she devised fresh schemes of amusement.

"Lady Haredale is so fresh!" Una had once remarked, to the intense amusement of her partner, at one of those "children's parties," which are given that grown-up people may admire the children, and amuse themselves.

These three children, in the afternoon in Easter week on which Amethyst was expected, had grouped themselves into the bow-window of the drawing-room, looking with their long hair, black legs, and fashionable frocks, like a contemporary picture in Punch.

"Dismal place this!" said Una, yawning and looking out at the garden.

"Oh," said Kattern, as the next girl, Katherine, was usually called, "my lady will have all the old set here soon."

They often called their mother "my lady," after the manner of their half-brother and sister.

"Yes," said Victoria, the youngest, in a slow, high-toned drawl. "It's quite six weeks since we've seen Tony. He'll be coming soon, and Frank Chichester, I dare say. Frank'll give you a chance, Una."

"Frank Chichester! I don't value boys; they have no conversation. You and Kattern may pull caps for him."

"Tory's too rude," said Kattern. "He never

forgave her for saying, when he asked her to dance, that she must watch him to see how he moved."

"I thought that was *chic*," said Tory; "some men like it, and coax you."

"He's too young for it," said the experienced Una; "not *my* style at all."

"Ah, we know *your* style—dear Tony."

"Be quiet," interposed Una, angrily, and with scarlet cheeks; "what's my style to such little chits as you?"

"Little chits indeed!" said Tory. "*You* might be glad to be a little chit. You're getting to the awkward age, and you won't have a little girl's privileges much longer. You'd better look out. And besides, we shall none of us wear as well as my lady."

"There'll be Amethyst," said Kattern. "If she's so awfully pretty, we shall be out of the running."

"She's sure to be bread-and-butterish and goody; that won't pay," said Tory. "Now be quiet, I want to finish my book before she comes."

"What's it about?" asked Kattern.

"She married the wrong man, and the hero wants her to run away with him, but I suppose the husband will die, so it will all come right!" said Tory, drawing up her black legs into a comfortable attitude, and burying herself in her book.

On that morning Amethyst had been taken to London by her aunt; and, by no means so miserable as she thought she ought to have been, was delivered over to her father's care.

Matters had settled themselves fairly pleasantly for Miss Haredale. Her house was let, and an old friend had asked her to go abroad with her for the summer, so that she was not left to solitude—a greater consolation just now to Amethyst than to herself. The girl felt the parting; but eager

interest in the new old house, longing for her mother and sisters, and shy pleasure in her father's notice, overwhelmed the feeling and pushed it aside for the time. She was delighted when her father took her to lunch at Verey's, and enjoyed the strawberry ice which he gave her. She tried to adapt her conversation to what she supposed might be Lord Haredale's tastes, and asked him if the hunting near Cleverley was good.

"Fond of riding, eh?" he said. "I haven't been out for years,—never was much in my line. But your aunt, she was the best horse-woman in the county. Fellows used to lay bets on what ugly places Annabel Haredale would go in for next. But she was up to the game, and when she was expected to show off would ride as if she were following a funeral—make them open all the gates for her, and then go ahead like a bird and distance everybody.—You'll do, if you have her hand at a horse's mouth, and her seat on the saddle."

Amethyst found some difficulty in picturing her aunt flying over the country like a bird, and answered humbly—

"I never rode anything but Dobbin, the Rectory pony, papa; but he could take a flat ditch, if it wasn't too wide. I should like hunting."

"Well, we'll see about it next winter. I'll manage to mount you, perhaps, somehow."

"Oh, papa, I don't want anything that's any trouble. I like everything that comes handy."

She smiled gaily as she spoke, and her sweet light-hearted look struck her father.

"You take after my lady," he said aloud, and then under his moustaches, "and, by Jove! you'll cut her out too."

Amethyst's gaiety subsided as they came to the little country station, and were driving through

the lanes to Cleverley Hall. Her heart beat very fast—it was the intensest moment her young life had known.

"Shy, eh?" said her father good-naturedly, as they reached the Hall. "Never mind—we take things easy. Visitors in the drawing-room, do you say?"—to the servant. "Generally are, I think. My lady would have made a circle of mermen and savages if she had been shipwrecked with Robinson Crusoe." Amethyst hardly heard; she followed her father into the long low room, full of misty afternoon sunlight. She did not heed that several figures rose hurriedly as they entered; she heard a clear sweet voice say—

"Why here she is! Here's my big girl!" and, full in the dazzle of that confusing sunlight, she saw her mother's slender figure and smiling face.

As the welcoming arms clasped her, and the smiling lips kissed her, Amethyst felt as if she had never known what happiness meant before.

CHAPTER V.

SISTERS.

THE visitors, who were introduced by Lady Haredale as, "Our neighbours at Ashfield, Mr. Leigh, and Mrs. Leigh," speedily took their leave. Amethyst had hardly seen them; for the whole evening was dazzling and dreamy to her, full of emotion and excitement.

It was hours before she could sleep, though a wakeful night was a new experience to her. But when she woke the next morning rather late, she was sensible of the light of common day, and came down fresh and cheerful to find herself the first at breakfast, and nobody there to receive her apologies for having overslept herself.

Breakfast was in the "library"—a pleasant room, but with no books in it to account for its appellation; and Lady Haredale soon appeared, while the three girls straggled in by degrees.

"Now, you bad children," said Lady Haredale gaily, as the meal concluded, "you know you have all got to make up your minds that Amethyst will go out with me, and that you are all still in the school-room."

"Where is it?" asked Tory, with her lazy drawl.

"There isn't much to go out for, that I see—down here," said Una.

"Oh, you are all spoiled," said Lady Haredale. "Amethyst never saw such a set of ignorant creatures. I shall leave her to tell you what good little girls should be like."

There was a sweet lightsome tone in Lady Haredale's voice, that seemed to Amethyst to indicate the most delightful relations between herself and her daughters, though the three girls did not look responsive.

"Have you any pretty frocks, my dear?" said Lady Haredale, as she rose to go away. "I mean to have some parties, and there will be people here. If his lordship won't let us go to London, we must amuse ourselves here, mustn't we? Though I don't despair of London yet."

"I don't know—I'm afraid you wouldn't think my best dress very pretty, mamma."

"'Mamma,'—how pretty the old name is on her tongue!"

Amethyst blushed.

"I'm afraid it's old-fashioned," she said, "but the Rectory girls at Silverfold say 'mamma.' Do *we* call you 'mother'?"

"Do you know," said Lady Haredale, "'mamma' is *so* old-fashioned that I think it's quite *chic*. And very pretty of you; go on—I like it. And never mind the frocks. Of course it's my place to dress you up and show you off—and I will. I'm glad you're such a pretty creature."

She kissed Amethyst lightly as she passed her, and went away, leaving the girl embarrassed by the outspoken praise. But Amethyst knew, or thought she knew, all about her own beauty, and accepted it as one of the facts of life; so she roused herself in a moment, clapped her hands together,

and sprang at her sisters—seizing Una round the waist.

"Come! come! let us look at each other, let us find each other out!—How big you all are! Come and tell me what work you are doing, and what you each go in for; let's have a splendid talk together."

She pulled Una down beside her on the sofa, and looked smiling into her face. She had not been grown up so long as not to be quite ready for companionship with these younger girls, and girls came natural to her.

Una looked back wistfully into the laughing eyes. She was as tall as Amethyst, and her still childish dress accentuated the lanky slenderness of her figure, which seemed weighed down by the enormous quantities of reddish brown hair that fell over her shoulders and about her face. Indeed she looked out of health; all the colour in her face was concentrated in her full red lips, and her wide-open eyes were set in very dark circles. She looked, spite of her short frock and her long hair, older than her real age, and as unlike a natural healthy school-girl as the most "intense" and æsthetic taste could desire. Kattern was prettier, and, as Amethyst expressed it to herself, more comfortable-looking, but she had a stupid face; and by far the shrewdest, keenest glances came from Tory's darker eyes, which had an elfish malice in them, that caused Amethyst mentally to comment on her as "a handful for any teacher."

"We don't do any work—we're neglected," she said, perching herself on the arm of the sofa, and looking at her sisters as they sat upon it, with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. "I expect we shall have some lessons now, though,

we're 'in the school-room,' now we are in the country—like the Miss Leighs."

"You could not do regular lessons when you were travelling," said Amethyst, "but I dare say you're all good at French and German. We might have some readings together anyhow. I don't mean to be idle, Una—you'll help me to stick to work of some kind, won't you?"

"You'd better ask me, Amethyst," said Tory. "I think education might be amusing. Una never does anything she can help of any sort, she's always tired or something."

"There's never anything worth doing," said Una languidly, "it's so dull."

"It won't be so dull next week," said Kattern, with meaning, while Una coloured and shot a savage glance at her.

"Dear me!" said Amethyst. "We shan't be dull. There are always such heaps of things to do and to think of. But tell me about the people who are coming next week, and about the neighbours round here."

"There are Miss Riddell and her brother," said Una. "He's the parson, but it seems they're in society here. They'll be a bore most likely."

"And there are the Leighs," said Kattern. "There's a young Leigh, who looks rather promising."

"And next week," said Tory, "the Lorrimores, and Damers, and Tony."

"Who is Tony?"

"Oh, Tony's quite a tame cat here," said Tory, manifestly mimicking some one. "He's always round. My lady has him about a great deal, and he's useful, he's got a little money. His wife ran away from him—his fault I dare say; and now they're di——"

"Tory!" interposed Una, starting up from her lounging attitude, "be quiet directly, you don't know what you're talking about. I won't have it!"

"You can't help Amethyst getting to know things," said Tory in her slowest drawl; but she gave in, and swung herself off the end of the sofa, calling Kattern to come out in the garden.

Una let herself drop back on the sofa, it was characteristic of her that she never sat upright a moment longer than she could help it, and looked furtively round under her hair at her sister. Amethyst, however, had encountered children before, possessed of a desire to shock their betters, and took Tory's measure according to her lights; which were to take no notice of improper remarks, especially as Una had shut the little one up so effectually.

"Well, I must go and write to auntie," she said; "and then shall we go out too, Una?"

"Yes, if you like," said Una, and with a sudden impulse she put up her face to Amethyst's, and kissed her.

During the next week or ten days Amethyst was so much taken up with her own family that the various introductions in the neighbourhood made very little impression on her. The result on her mind of these first days of intercourse was curious. She did not by any means think her home perfection. She had indeed been vaguely prepared for much that was imperfect; and she had far too clear and definite a standard not to know that her sisters really were "neglected," and was too much accustomed to good sense not to be aware that Lady Haredale talked nonsense. But there was a glamour over her which, perhaps happily, softened all the rough edges. Amethyst fell in love with her new "mamma," and Una

conceived a sudden and vehement devotion for the pretty, cheerful, chattering elder sister, who was so unlike any one in her previous experience. Amethyst forgot to criticize what her mother said or did, when the way of saying it or doing it was so congenial to one who shared the same soft gaiety of nature; and Una, suffering, poor child, in many ways, from the "neglect" of which Tory had too truly spoken, followed all Amethyst's suggestions, and clung to her with ever-increasing affection.

A lady was recommended by Miss Riddell to come every morning and teach the three girls, and though Amethyst did not exactly share in the lessons, she talked about them, and helped in the preparation of them, and made them the fashion, and Tory at least began, as she had said, to find education interesting. This home-life went on as a background during all the ensuing weeks, when outer interests began to assert themselves, and the flood of life for Amethyst rolled on fast and full.

But all along, and at first especially, there were many intervals filled up with teaching her sisters the delights of country walks and primrose pickings; with reading her favourite books to them, stirring them up about their lessons, and, all unintentionally, in giving them something else to think of than the vagaries of their elders' life.

A "school-room" had really been provided for them, high up in one of the corners of the house, with a window in its angle which caught the sun all day, and looked over the pretty, rough open country in which Cleverley lay. Here, with flowers and books and girlish rummage, was the most home-like spot the Haredale girls had ever known; and here late one sunny afternoon lounged Una, curled up in the corner of an old sofa—

doing, as was still too often the case, absolutely nothing.

Suddenly a light step came flying up the stairs, and Amethyst ran into the room, and stood before her in the full glory of the early evening sunlight, saying in her fresh girlish voice—

"Look, Una—look!"

Amethyst was already in her white dinner-dress, and round her neck was clasped a broad band of glowing purple jewels. Stars of deep lustrous colour gleamed in her hair and on her bosom, her eyes shone in the sunshine, which poured its full glory on her innocent eager face, which in that clear and searching light seemed to share with the jewels a sort of heavenly radiance, a splendour of light and colour from a fairer and purer world.

"Amethyst," exclaimed Una, starting up, "you look like an angel."

Amethyst laughed, and stepping out of the sunlight, came and knelt down by Una's side; no longer a heavenly vision of light and colour, but a happy-faced girl, decorated with quaint and splendid ornaments of amethysts set with small diamonds.

"Mamma says that she has given me my own jewels. She says she was so fond of these beautiful stones that she made up her mind to call me after them, and I am to wear them whenever I can. Aren't they lovely?"

"Yes," said Una; "I didn't know my lady had them still. They're just fit for you."

Amethyst took off the splendid necklet, and held it in her hands.

"They're too beautiful to be vain of," she said, dreamily. "It's rather nice to have a stone and colour of one's own. I used to think amethysts and purple rather dull when we chose favourites at

school. Amethyst means temperance, you know. It's a dull meaning, but I expect it's a very useful one for me now."

"Why, what do you mean?" said Una.

"Well!" said Amethyst, "I do enjoy everything so very much. I feel as if music, and dancing, and going out with mother, and having pretty things to wear, would be so very delightful. So if the most delightful things of all remind me that I mustn't let myself go, but be temperate in all things, it ought to be getting some good out of the beauty, oughtn't it?"

Amethyst spoke quite simply, as one to whom various little methods of self-discipline were as natural a subject of discussion as various methods of study.

"I hope you'll never look different from what you did just now," said Una, in a curious strained voice, and laying her head on her sister's shoulder; "but it's all going to begin."

"Why, Una, what is it?" as the words ended in a stifled sob. "Headache again? You naughty child, I'm sure you want tonics, or sea air, or something. And I wish you would let me plait all this hair into a tail, it is much too hot and heavy for you."

"Oh no, no! not now," said Una, now fairly crying, "not just now—let it alone. I don't want to be grown up!"

"A tail doesn't look grown up," said Amethyst in a matter-of-fact voice. "Any way there's nothing to cry about. If you want to come down and see the people after dinner, you must lie still now and rest. But you ought to go to bed early, and get a good night. When people cry for nothing, it shows they're ill."

"I dare say it does, but I'm not ill," said Una.

"Then you're silly," said Amethyst, with cheerful

briskness; but Una did not resent the tone. She gave Amethyst a long clinging kiss, and then lay back on the sofa; while her sister went off to arrange the jewels to her satisfaction, in preparation for the first state dinner-party at which she was to make her appearance.

CHAPTER VI.

HISTORICAL TYPES.

"WELL, father—how goes the world in Cleverley? How are you getting on with the charming but undesirable family at the Hall, of whom Aunt Meg writes to me?"

Sylvester Riddell and his father were walking up and down the centre path of the Rectory kitchen-garden, smoking an after-breakfast pipe together, between borders filled with tulips, daffodils, polyanthuses, and other spring flowers, behind which espaliers were coming into blossom, and early cabbages and young peas sprouting up in fresh and orderly rows. The red tower of the church looked over a tall hedge of lilac trees, and beyond was the little street, soon leading into fields and open, prettily-wooded country, rising into low hills in the distance.

Sylvester had just arrived for a few days' visit from Oxbridge, where he had recently obtained a first-class, a fellowship, and an appointment as tutor of his college. His father and grandfather had both been scholars, and such honours seemed to them almost the hereditary right of their family.

Sylvester inherited from his father long angular

limbs, rugged but well-formed features, and brown skin. But the dreamy look, latent in the father's fine grey eyes, was habitual in the son's; while a certain humorous twinkle in their corners had had less time to develop itself, and was much less apparent in the younger man's face.

The old Rector had shaggy grey hair, eyebrows, and whiskers; he had grown stout, and his every-day clothes were somewhat loose and shabby. Sylvester had brown hair, cut short, and was close shaved, and his dress was neat, and did his tailor credit. Still, the father's youth was closely recalled by this son of his old age, and the two found each other congenial spirits.

The fox-terrier that barked in front of them, and the old colley that paced soberly behind, turned eyes of kindness alike on both, the great grey cat rubbed against both pairs of trousers, and the old gardener lay in wait to show Sylvester his side of a dispute with "master" as to the clipping of the lilac hedges.

Fifty years or so ago the Rector of Cleverley had been a young under-graduate, remarkable for the fine scholarship and elegant verse-making of his day, but with a touch of genius that made him differ from his fellows; careless, simple, and untidy, yet fond of society and good fellowship, full of the romance and sentiment of his day,—a man who admired pretty women, but had only one lasting love, from whom circumstances had divided him till he married her late in life, and lost her soon after Sylvester's birth.

When, on his marriage, he took the living of Cleverley, he became an excellent parish priest, the personal friend of all his flock, and deeply beloved by them; a little shy of modern organization, and more hard on his curates for mispronouncing

Greek names than on many worse offenders. He was a gentleman, and a man of the world who had other experiences than those of parochial life, and belonged to a race of clergy more common in the last generation than in this one.

Sylvester was meant to be much the same sort of person as his father; but he was born in a grave and more self-conscious age. He had all the Rector's cordial kindliness, and much of his keen insight; but the romantic, dreamy side of the character was both more carefully hidden and stronger in the younger man. The sentiment of the eighth decade of the nineteenth century was less cheerful and light-hearted than that of the third or fourth. The Rector had been among those who still laughed and sighed with Moore, and smiled with Praed (he had not been the sort of man to give himself over to Byron). He had fallen in love with the miller's and the gardener's fair daughters in the early days of Tennyson. Sylvester dived into Browning, and dreamed with Rossetti. He was haunted by ideals which he did not hope to realize; and, moreover, felt himself compelled frequently to pretend that he had no ideals at all.

And although he had worked hard to attain his university distinctions, he took the duties they involved somewhat lightly, and hardly found in his profession a sufficient interest and aim in life, fulfilling its claims in fact in a somewhat formal fashion.

He was, however, a very affectionate son, and was delighted to find himself at home again, and full of curiosity as to the new-comers at Cleverley Hall.

"Are they as charming as they appeared at first sight?" he asked.

"My dear boy," said the Rector in a confidential

tone, "they are very charming. But I'm sorry for the little girl. There's something ideal about her. But it's a bad stock, Syl, a bad stock!"

"So I've always heard," said Sylvester, slightly amused at his father's tone of reluctant admiration. "But what's amiss with them? We're to dine there to-night, I believe?"

"Yes," said the Rector, "and we shall have a very pleasant evening. You see, my dear boy, the ladies here are rather pleased with Lady Haredale. They were prejudiced—very much prejudiced against her. Now they say she is much nicer and quieter than they expected, and they believe that the reports about her are exaggerated. But they don't see that she is so handsome. The fact is, you know, Syl," and here Mr. Riddell paused in his walk and spoke in confidential accents, "that she belongs to another order of women altogether—to the fascinating women of history, and her beauty is a fact quite beyond discussion. But she's not a good woman, Sylvester, and never will be."

"The fascinating women of history," said Sylvester—"Cleopatra, and others, were perhaps a little deficient in moral backbone. But I'm sure, father, Lady Haredale must be a charming hostess. I quite look forward to the party to-night. So she outshines her daughter, I suppose."

"My dear boy," said Mr. Riddell, "there's something about that little girl that goes to one's heart. What is to become of her?"

"But what is it that is so dangerous about Lady Haredale?" said Sylvester. "She doesn't appear to offend the proprieties."

"She has no principle, Syl—not a stiver," said the Rector, "and I like the look of none of their friends. So, my dear boy, I wouldn't advise you to get drawn into the set too much. They're very

sociable and hospitable. Young Leigh seems a good deal attracted."

"Old Lucy? Really? Has he succumbed to the historical type of fascination? The young lady must be charming indeed. But, father, I am immensely interested. I must study these historical ladies—at a distance, of course. But there's Aunt Meg. I must go and ask her how the parish is getting on."

Miss Riddell, who represented the practical element in the household and family, honestly said that she liked gossip. Sylvester called it studying life. In both, it was really kindly interest in old friends and neighbours.

But to-day, she was so much taken up with the new-comers, and evidently admired them so much, that Sylvester prepared for the dinner-party with much curiosity. As he followed his father and aunt into the long low drawing-room, he was struck at once by its more tasteful and cheerful appearance than when he had last seen it, and by the lively murmur of conversation that filled it, and, as he advanced to receive Lady Haredale's greeting, he did not think that she was splendidly dressed, or startlingly fashionable, but he perceived at once that she was a great beauty. She introduced "my eldest daughter," and Sylvester saw, standing by her side, a tall girl, in the simplest of white gowns, but with splendid jewels clasping her slender throat, and shining in her hair. She smiled, and looked at him with the most cordial friendliness, and she struck him as quite unlike the general run of young ladies, with her lithe graceful figure, her full soft lips, and her clear spiritual eyes.

"I know what it is," thought Sylvester, "she is Rossetti's ideal; but he never reached her. She is the maiden that Chiaro saw. But she is also a

happy girl. By Jove! no wonder the dad was so impressive!"

Presently Mrs. Leigh and her son arrived to complete the party, and were greeted by Amethyst as well-established acquaintances.

Sylvester knew Lucian Leigh well, had been at school with him, and believed him to be, in all points, a good fellow. But as he watched him making small talk with greater ease than usual to the young lady, it struck Sylvester as a new idea that it was a pity that Lucian's appearance was so deceptive; he had not at all the sort of character suggested by the first sight of his face. But that the two faces harmonized well as they sat side by side at the table, was indisputable.

Presently, he saw Amethyst turn to the Rector, who sat on her left hand, and begin to talk to him with pretty respectful courtesy. Evidently she did not think it well-behaved to be absorbed in her younger companion, and Mr. Riddell succeeded in amusing her, for she laughed and looked interested, and he evidently put forward his best powers of pleasing.

Sylvester looked with curiosity at the rest of the company. Some, of course, were well-known neighbours; others, strangers staying in the house, who did not greatly take his fancy. The most prominent of these was a middle-aged, military-looking man, who was introduced as Major Fowler, and who struck Sylvester as a specimen of the 'bad style' which had been sought for in vain in Lady Haredale and her daughter. Lady Haredale called him Tony, and he seemed on intimate terms in the house, especially with the younger girls, who were found in the drawing-room after dinner—Una with a bright colour in her usually pale cheeks, and a sudden flow of childish

chatter. Presently Victoria, with an air of infantine confidence, came up to Sylvester and said—

"Please, are there any primroses growing here?"

"Primroses! why yes; haven't you seen them?"

"We have never gathered any primroses, we want to go and get some. Will you show us the way?" said Tory, looking up in his face.

"Oh, Tory," said Amethyst, who, passing near, heard this request; "there are plenty of primroses which we can find quite easily."

"But I should be delighted to show you the best places for them," said Sylvester, with alacrity.

"Mr. Leigh will come too," said Tory, turning to Lucian. "We're Cockneys, we want to be taught to enjoy the country, mother says so."

"We'll have a grand primrose picnic," said Lucian. "My sisters will come too. Miss Haredale, do let us show you your first primrose."

"Oh, I have gathered plenty of primroses," said Amethyst, smiling, but with a blush and a puzzled look, as if she did not quite know what it behoved her to say. "But one cannot have too many," she added after a moment.

The primrose gathering was arranged for the next day, ostensibly between the Miss Haredales, and the girls from Ashfield, escorted by their governess.

"But," said Tory afterwards with a knowing look, "we shan't have to gather them by ourselves, you'll see."

"Tory!" exclaimed Amethyst, "you should not have asked Mr. Riddell and Mr. Leigh to come and gather primroses with us! And how could you say that you did not know where they grew, when we got some yesterday?"

"Oh, they'll like to come," said Tory, "and I'm quite little enough to ask them."

She made an indescribable face at Amethyst, and walked away as she spoke.

"Did you like your first party, my pretty girl?" said Lady Haredale, putting a caressing hand on Amethyst's shoulder.

"Oh yes, mamma, it was delightful."

"I am going to be the old mother now, you know, Tony. It is this child's turn now."

"You will have a great deal of satisfaction in teaching her," said Tony, with an intonation which Amethyst did not understand, and a look she did not like.

But, as she shut herself into her own room, the images in her mind were full of colour and brightness. She felt that she had begun to live. The manifold relations of family life, the new acquaintances, even the new dresses and jewels, filled her with interest and pleasure so great that it brought a pang of remorse.

"Poor auntie!" she thought, "and now she is dull, without me!"

And, being too much excited to sleep, she sat down to write some of her first eager impressions to Miss Haredale; till, at what seemed to her a wickedly late hour, she heard a light soft foot in the passage.

She opened the door softly, and there was Una, still in her white evening frock, with shining eyes and burning cheeks, starting nervously at sight of her sister.

"Una! Do you know how late it is? Where have you been? How your head will ache tomorrow!"

"I've been in the smoking-room and I've smoked a cigarette, and tasted a brandy-and-

soda!" said Una, with a touch of Tory's wicked defiance.

"Would mother let you?" said Amethyst slowly.

"Oh yes!" said Una, shrugging her shoulders, "but *I* shan't let *you!*"

She flung her arms round Amethyst and kissed her with burning lips, then scuttled away into her own room.

CHAPTER VII.

NO CUNNING TO BE STRANGE.

"WHEN do you suppose Amethyst will find my lady out?" said Kattern and Tory, as they started for the primrose-picking the next day, and Amethyst ran back again to beg her mother to drive round to the wood and join them.

"Not yet," said Tory, "my lady is making up to her, as much as ever she did to any man she ever went in for, and Amethyst would believe black was white just at present."

"I'd like to see her face, if we told her what my lady is really like."

"You are not to tell her," said Una, suddenly turning round upon them, "I won't have it. Let her be happy while she can; *I* shall tell her, when I think it proper."

Una looked languid and dull to-day. She did not care for gathering primroses, and she was not strong enough to enjoy long out-door expeditions. She watched Amethyst, with a look on her face, and thoughts in her heart, which would much have astonished the elder girl if she had noticed the one, or guessed at the other.

Amethyst good-naturedly patronized Kate and

Gertie Leigh, girls matching in age with Kattern and Tory; she made friends with their governess, who had recently been the head girl at a rival school to St. Etheldred's, and was discussing the honours respectively gained by the two institutions at all the recent examinations, with the heartiest interest, when the party was enlarged by the arrival of Miss Riddell and her nephew, and Mrs. Leigh and her son. Lady Haredale, Major Fowler, and some of the other guests at Cleverley also turned up. It was a day of rare spring loveliness, blue sky, young green leaves, and springing flowers.

"A day of beginnings," Sylvester Riddell said, as he noted the budding oak trees, the unfolding blossoms, the opening intercourse that was still in its first spring.

"You like the woods?" he said to Amethyst.

"Oh yes," she said, "I like everything here; you can't think how pleasant beginning to be at home is."

"I suppose you are making several beginnings," he said.

"Yes," she answered, "I am beginning to know my sisters—and every one here—and next week I am going to my first ball."

"Beginnings are very charming when they do not imply endings," said Sylvester tritely; but he was thinking so much of the lovely slender girl before him that he spoke half mechanically.

"That can never be," said Amethyst, with sudden gravity. "My school days are ended, and my living with my aunt. Beginnings must come out of endings—but then they *are* beginnings," she added; and stooping, she picked a primrose, round which still lingered the large faded leaves of last year, and showed it to him, with a grave smile on her soft young lips.

Sylvester never forgot her as she stood there, dressed all in mossy green that harmonized with the woods. He had a dim sense that a beginning was coming to him, as he took the fresh primrose and the faded leaf out of her hand.

"One ought to be able to spin a poem out of this," he said; but just then Lucian Leigh came springing down the bank, a picturesque figure in his brown suit, and looking, as the little girls climbed and scrambled after him, as like a young wood god, as Amethyst was like a wood nymph.

"They matched exactly," Sylvester thought, as they drew by instinct together, and through all the merry afternoon, seemed the motive of the picture, the centre of the piece.

"It is quite charming to be so rustic," said Lady Haredale; while Tory and Kattern forgot about being charming as they scrambled about with their contemporaries, and Amethyst drank in happiness with the sun and the air. To-day was indeed a delightful beginning.

It began a great deal. Lady Haredale was a person who liked something to be always going on, and hardly a day passed without some little scheme of pleasure, some opportunity for meetings something that gave colour and brightness to the days. Distant neighbours seemed to come nearer, and Cleverley had never been so gay within the memory of man.

Yet it all seemed quite simple. Lady Haredale, the Cleverley ladies said, liked simple pleasures, and freely owned that she must have inexpensive ones. There was the county ball for a climax, and various set entertainments given at the country houses round for salient points; but Lady Haredale did little but keep open house in a sort of free and easy way. Lord Haredale was a good deal

absent in London, and Major Fowler, so old a family friend, acted as a sort of deputy master of the house, showed the young men the way to the sideboard, set games of billiards on foot, took a hand at whist in the evenings. Sometimes, when there were young people, they all played round games, and put three-penny bits into the pool. It could not be true, that whisper of Lady Haredale playing for high stakes and losing money, or she could not have laughed so merrily over the three-penny "vingt-un with variations."

Then, when the wind was cold after playing tennis, for which the season was still early, she made such pretty fun over producing champagne and claret cup at afternoon tea, that, though such was not the Cleverley custom except at large garden-parties, there seemed nothing to wonder at; —though it was a pity that so young a girl as Una Haredale should be allowed to drink it.

Lady Haredale did not dress too youthfully, or try to keep her beautiful daughter in the background; on the contrary, everything was arranged to make a good time for Amethyst; Lady Haredale chose her dresses with the utmost care, and taught her how to arrange them becomingly, with so outspoken a delight in the girl's beauty as almost rendered her flattery harmless. Those were happy weeks. Now and then came little shocks and startling incidents; but they fell on unheeding ears.

A very few words are enough to tell Amethyst's story. She and Lucian Leigh fell in love with each other; suddenly, rapturously, without delay or misgiving, almost at the first sight of each other's fair faces, almost with the first sense of an answering stir in each other's souls, Lucian courted her in a quiet but most unmistakable fashion; and soon, life for

Amethyst meant his presence, his words and looks. She was carried off her feet, caught out of herself. Even as she knew "what made the assembly shine" for her, she was well assured that she "made the ball fine" for him. She did not remain unconscious or ignorant of what had befallen her. Love did not come to her with slow, cautious, and imperceptible footsteps, he caught her in a sweet frenzy, which left no space for misgivings; while her quickly answering warmth probably hastened and intensified the passion, which might have seemed alien to Lucian's slower and shyer nature.

A few social meetings and games of tennis together—one or two encounters "by chance," which yet were so important that it seemed as if the whole course of life must have been arranged to bring them about—a sunny Sunday or two, in the same church, singing the same hymns—a belief in each other's goodness, so that no misgivings troubled their joy in each other's charms, scraps of talk—wonderful glances—the county ball, where Amethyst's success woke Lucian to the sudden fear of rivalry, and where the world began to say that she was a great beauty—a dance the next night at a neighbour's house—a long, long waltz together, then, dim lights, heavy-scented flowers, a wonderful sense of being alone, after the crowd of dancers; then feelings found words, words hardly needed, his arms were round her, his kiss on her lips, and, after scarcely a doubt or a fear, in three short weeks, in a dozen meetings, Amethyst's heart was won, her promise given, and all her story, as she believed, told.

But, with the actual promise given, with the spoken words, Lucian, at any rate, woke up to a sense of real life, and of what it behoved him to do.

"To-morrow I must come to Lord Haredale. I hope he won't kick me down-stairs."

"Why should he be angry? We are not doing wrong.—That is—ought I to have told mother first?—Was it too quick?" faltered Amethyst, crimson and trembling with sudden misgiving.

"Too quick! It has seemed a life-time since last night, before I could speak to you! I am my own master. But you, who might have all London at your feet, they will say I ought to have let you have a season in town first."

"But that wouldn't have made any difference."

"No? I don't suppose it would. Nothing could make any difference to me. We'll go and live at Toppings. You like the country. I meant to see if I could not go to Norway, and get some seal fishing; but I shan't care for that now, we'll settle down at once."

But this was going too fast for Amethyst.

"Oh don't," she said, "don't; I—I cannot think.—It is too much.—I want to stop—to wait—not to have any more now!"

She turned white as she spoke, overwhelmed with the rush of emotion; while Lucian, though only half-comprehending, held himself back, drew her on to a seat, and said, "I've done something clumsy, and frightened you. I always do."

"Oh no—no—no! But oh! It is so wonderful—it is—it is like death!" cried Amethyst. She did not in the least know what she meant, and in a moment the strange rapture passed, the colour came back in natural blushes, her eyes fell, and she rose from her seat.

"Some one will come. Let us go back. Let us find mother."

Lucian laughed a little curious laugh, and as the music ceased, and footsteps sounded, he offered

her his arm formally, and led her back into the lighted ball-room; where, at the entrance to the conservatory, her partner claimed her, and he began to remember that there was a young lady somewhere to whom he had been introduced.

A boyish shyness seized on him, he turned his back on Amethyst, and went off hastily to the other end of the room. And she, away from him, suddenly found out that she was utterly, wonderfully happy, and laughed and danced with joyous glee. She did not want to speak to him or to come near him again just yet, she only wanted to feel happy, in the whirl of the music and the dancing, and the sparkle of the lights. While he stood in a corner, and thought how lovely she looked.

There were other people in the carriage with Amethyst and her mother as they drove home; but as soon as they arrived there, and the "Good-nights" had passed, she pursued Lady Haredale to the cosy dressing-room, where she sat up late sometimes with a novel, or dawdled over one in the morning, when disinclined to come down-stairs. She had taken off her evening dress, and was sitting by the fire in a pretty blue dressing-gown, which gave her an unusually youthful look, when Amethyst, still in her white ball dress, came in and stood by her side.

"Well, little girl, what is it?"

"Oh, mamma," said Amethyst, "mamma; I thought I ought to come." She stammered a little, then lifted up her stately head, and said simply, "Lucian Leigh has asked me to marry him."

"Already?" exclaimed Lady Haredale. "Why I shall never make a match-making mother. I saw that he was *épris*, but I never thought of its happening at once!"

"I—I am afraid it seems quick—but, mother—

I hope you won't be angry, nor my father—but I said yes."

"You did? and suppose my lord says no?"

"Oh, mamma, he will not?"

"Suppose he does?"

"I should wait till he consented, I couldn't change. But indeed, mamma, he has *quite* enough money."

"The little mercenary thing! She has thought of that!"

"No—no—but I thought there could be nothing else, he is so good."

"Now look here, Amethyst," said Lady Haredale, standing up, and laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, "this is your first fancy?"

"Mother!"

"Well, yes, I supposed so. Now listen, and no one shall say I don't tell you all the truth. You are a beauty. That is a very different thing from being a pretty girl. You would have—I could ensure your having—a great success, and you might make a very great marriage. I don't think many mothers would let you marry in the country at eighteen. But, on the other hand, we're as poor as rats, as you know; if you marry young Leigh you are provided for, and if you think you love him—I believe she *is* in love with him—all my children are susceptible! No, I won't talk you out of it."

"Talking could not make any difference," said Amethyst; then suddenly—"Oh, mamma, I don't want to be wilful, I will try to be good, but please—please don't say I must not!"

There was a passion in her tone, which Lady Haredale felt.

"No," she said. "You *shall* have him! How like you are to poor pretty Blanche; you shan't be talked out of your lover as she was. I'll not

have it on my conscience. But does the child think she knows her own mind?"

Amethyst felt indescribably jarred and hurt by her mother's manner. Her cheeks burnt and her eyes were bright, as she answered with equal straightforwardness, and with unexpected passion—

"I should have liked to be a beauty, and have a success; I know I should like it. But that's all nothing, compared—compared to *him*," as the tears came in floods, and she hid her face.

"Ah!" said Lady Haredale.—"Poor little girl, it's a shame to tease her! You are a good child, my pretty Amethyst, and you shall stay good, if you can. Come, kiss me and forgive me, and you shall have your way." Amethyst threw herself into her mother's arms, and, in clinging kisses, soon forgot her vexation. "Mother was right to make sure;" and she only felt that she had the kindest and tenderest mother ever known, and the most sympathetic. For Lady Haredale, with a sudden change of tone, began to question her, and listened to the little idyll with as fresh and eager an interest as if she had been Amethyst's sister or school friend.

"My darling, it's lovely. It's the sweetest thing I ever knew, and I won't let anything interfere with it."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE.

LUCIAN LEIGH'S side of the story did not meet with so favourable a reception. Like Lady Haredale, Mrs. Leigh had not taken warning in time, and, while she was thinking of cautioning her son against the penniless beauty, he stood before her with the tale of his successful wooing, quite unprepared for the displeasure with which she received it.

He was entirely independent of her, and she had no power to prevent him from marrying whom he would; and when she comprehended that the offer had been made and accepted, her consternation was great.

"Lucian! In three weeks! One of those Haredales! Nothing could have grieved me more."

"I don't think you can mean that, mother," said Lucian.

"You don't know what you are doing."

Lucian said nothing. The fewness of his words always made it difficult to argue with him. He made no protestations of passionate love, but he did not yield an inch, and only said at last—

"But I'm booked now, mother. I *have* proposed to her."

"Will you not at least give in to a delay? Have you no regard to my wishes?"

"Yes," said Lucian, "I wish you liked it. But I think I ought to settle it for myself. Anyway I *have* settled it."

"And have you no misgivings?"

"No," said Lucian, with a light in his handsome face never seen there before.

Mrs. Leigh felt as if she might as well argue with a statue. She went to bed in distress and uncertainty, and, early the next morning sent over a message to the Rectory, begging Mr. Riddell to come and see her at once. He was an old friend, and his office made her feel it right to consult him besides; and she was a woman who liked sympathy, and always talked freely of her troubles and anxieties.

He came before breakfast was over at Ashfield, and Mrs. Leigh, rising, with an eager squeeze of his hand, dismissed her little girls and their governess, and said tearfully—

"My dear Rector, you know everything I would say. I shall leave you with this foolish boy to persuade him, if possible—"

"I can go, mother, if you want to tell the Rector all your objections," said Lucian. "Anyway I don't see why you should go away. I *have* proposed to Miss Haredale, and she has accepted me. The thing is done."

Lucian turned scarlet as he spoke, and embarrassment gave a certain coldness to his tone. Mr. Riddell recognized that he would be hard to move.

"My dear boy," he said, as Mrs. Leigh, in spite of her son's words, left them alone together, "I

think I am sorry that you have been so hasty. Three weeks is a very short time."

"It's quite long enough," said Lucian.

"Yes, she is a beautiful girl, Lucian, and as guileless—as—as Psyche herself; and brought up by a good woman. But she is only eighteen, and no man can say what she will grow up to. There will be a very great deal of her, Lucian. She is a great prize. She is rarely beautiful, and she has brains, and is highly strung. She will expect a great deal of life. She does not know at all, yet, what she will need. She has all her growing and her living to do in the future."

"So have I," said Lucian. "But one knows very well what one will come to."

"Yes, my dear Lucian, that is the very thing. But no one can know what Amethyst Haredale will come to. It's a very serious thing to marry a girl who comes of so doubtful a stock. And, my dear boy, I am certain that her mother is not a good woman."

"Of course," said Lucian, "I know all about her people. I shall take her right away from them. She has never been with Lady Haredale."

"Your mind is quite made up?"

"Of course," said Lucian. "It's quite easy for me to marry early, and I don't see why I should not. My mother will get used to it."

Lucian still uttered no expressions of enthusiastic love. He hardly attempted to defend Amethyst. His fair, beautifully formed face was quite still and impassive. He had made up his mind and so had Amethyst, and, with her by his side, he meant to begin at once to lead the life to which he believed himself called; to live on his estate, look after his tenants, keep up his shooting, attend to public business, and set a good example in his own neighbourhood. As he said himself, he knew

exactly what he was going to grow to, and he never doubted that his wife would grow in the same direction as himself.

He was a thoroughly good fellow; but Mr. Riddell wondered whether he was quite the mate for the lovely child, in whose face a thousand possibilities were written, and whose nature was all in bud. The Rector was, however, a man who could recognize the inevitable. He saw that the engagement must be, and could only hope that the quick-springing love between the pair was warm enough to fuse these two natures into one. At least, they were still in a soft and malleable stage of existence. He set himself, therefore, not to talk over the young man, but to endeavour to reconcile Mrs. Leigh to her son's choice; and, what was perhaps equally hard, to the fact of his early marriage, and separation from her family circle.

Lucian set off for Cleverley Hall, looking and feeling much as if he had been about to walk up to a cannon's mouth. He was an odd mixture of self-confidence and unreadiness, and, though he felt perfectly sure that he was a right choice for Amethyst, he had no words in which to convey as much to her father.

All the trouble, however, was saved him, for he was shown into the morning room to Lady Haredale.

"Ah, Mr. Leigh," she said, "what am I to say to you? What have you been doing with my little girl? I don't think I ought to consent till she has seen a little of the world. I meant her to have such a success in London."

"But that wouldn't be much good after we were engaged," said Lucian. "And I don't think she would like it."

"Don't you?" said Lady Haredale, with a thought in her mind not very unlike her Rector's,

"Ah, you think she is a little nun. Well now, I am going to be quite frank with you. You know we are as poor as rats!"

"I—I—I have understood that—that Lord Haredale was—not wealthy," stammered Lucian, losing his self-possession entirely.

"As rats—as church mice! Of course *now* I have no reserves with you. We can't afford to take her out as we should like. Her grandfather's will gives her £3000 on her wedding-day. We can't give her a farthing more!"

"I know that—I don't care. I can settle——"

"Ah yes; you will tell Lord Haredale about that. Because we are going to say yes. We think we ought to have our girl settled. And, my dear Mr. Leigh—my dear Lucian, I want her to be happy. Oh, yes, you know about her poor sister. —That came of ambition—and I mean my Amethyst to have her way."

"I shall take care of her. I'll make her happy," said Lucian, touched, and with fervour.

As he spoke, Lord Haredale came in, shook hands with him, heard his carefully prepared speech as to his money matters, and answered it.

"Yes, my lady thinks we had better let her get settled at once. It will please her aunt, who brought her up. She is a good little thing, and I'm glad she should do well for herself."

"Well then," said Lady Haredale, "we don't like all these formalities, do we? You will much prefer coming to Amethyst. But your mother? I suppose she doesn't like it?"

"She does think we are rather young," said Lucian meekly.

"I shall talk to her. Now wait here, and I will find the child."

Lady Haredale went off to the school-room,

where Amethyst was restlessly trying to look as if nothing was happening, and the younger girls, well aware of a crisis, were secretly watching her.

"Well!" said Lady Haredale. "Now you can go and enjoy yourself. I quite mean to enjoy it all myself. Little girls, Amethyst has set you an excellent example. She has fallen in love, quite in an eligible direction, without any delay, in the most irreproachable manner. Mind you all go and do likewise!"

"Oh, *I* knew all about it," said Tory. "But he's much too well off and too eligible to be so handsome. It isn't fair!"

"It's an awful joke!" said Kattern.

Una stood silent for a moment, then flung herself on Amethyst's neck.

"Oh, how lucky you are!" she whispered, kissing her sister with hot quivering lips.

"So I am," whispered Amethyst in reply.

She was blushing and confused; but there was a dreamy blissful air about her, as if she hardly heard these characteristic comments on her choice. She freed herself gently from Una, and went up to her mother, who, laughing, but with something of real tenderness, kissed her, and took her away. Tory gave a skip.

"What a jolly lark," she said.

"It's no such thing," cried Una with passionate vehemence, as she rushed out of the room. "It's losing the only thing that made life tolerable, and I'd like to go and hang myself at once."

"I'll tell you what it is, Kat," said Tory. "Una's too great a fool for anything, and some day I shall tell Amethyst all about Tony."

"Una will half kill you if you do," said Tory. "Never mind about that now. Let's go into the

garden, then we can peep in at the windows and see Amethyst and her young man!"

There ensued a time which seemed to Amethyst afterwards like a piece out of an age of gold, each day more full than the one before it of absorbing, intoxicating bliss. There was the day when Lucian brought the ring, set with her namesake jewel, and put it on the pink girlish finger that had never worn a ring before, then spread out her soft delicate hand on his brown palm, and looked at it proudly, saying, "That shall stay there always. That means you belong to me." And the two hands closed tight upon each other, as if they never would unclasp again.

The first Sunday, too, when they went to church together, and gave thanks from the bottom of their young honest hearts for their great happiness, and when the hymn of the Heavenly City rang in Amethyst's ears with vague and mystic rapture. Heaven was near and earth was good, and she did not quite know the one from the other. All was joy.

As they came out, Lucian, with his shy, boyish smile, showed her a line in his hymn-book with a deep under-score.

> "Thine ageless walls are bonded
> With *amethysts unpriced*—"

"Oh, Lucian," she said, half shocked, "but you shouldn't think about me in church!"

"Yes, I should," said Lucian. "I shall think about you everywhere. Besides, we shall go to church together all our lives, you know, at Toppings. Then we'll remember to-day."

"As if we could ever forget it!" said Amethyst dreamily, while her heart beat, and her eyes shone.

"I never shall, as long as I live," said Lucian. "Look there, look at those long-tailed tits swinging in the hedge. Do you know they grow those long tails quite smooth and straight in a little round nest? How do they manage it?"

Lucian made his profession of life-long remembrance, and called her attention to the tits, much in the same tone of voice. He was not an emotional person, and his talk was mostly of what passed before his observant eyes.

But fate did not intend that either of them should forget that summer Sunday when "all in the blue unclouded weather" they looked forward to the life that they were beginning together, in a world that seemed to them both very good, with the Heavenly City in a rainbow-tinted mist, far—far ahead of them.

CHAPTER IX.

TONY.

THE wedding was fixed for the middle of July, and, in the middle of June, Lucian went to Toppings to arrange for having it prepared for the reception of his bride. His long minority had left him with plenty of ready money; but neither he nor Amethyst had grown up sufficiently to have much desire for house-decoration of an æsthetic kind. They were much more full of the long foreign tour, which was to follow their marriage, than of the details of their future house-keeping. He was also obliged to pay a visit to some elderly relations in his own county, so that he was absent from Cleverley for nearly a fortnight.

Amethyst meanwhile was free to give her mind to her wedding garments, which delighted Lady Haredale even more than the bride herself. Money or credit had been found for the trousseau, and Amethyst was too inexperienced to know that it was both very costly, and rather inadequate.

A visit, in the course of the wedding tour, was to be paid to Miss Haredale at Lausanne, where she was spending the summer, and Amethyst had few anticipations more delightful than that of

showing her Lucian to "auntie," whose congratulations had been full of incredulous pleasure.

In the meantime, Lady Haredale had been as sympathetic as a girl, promoting the love-idyll in every possible way, and devising the loveliest and most original costumes for her daughter. Amethyst set her own girlish fancy on an "amethyst" velvet, which she considered suitable to a young married lady, and felt would be becoming to herself; but she cared most to have her riding habit exactly what Lucian thought correct, and to choose hats of the shapes and colours which he admired.

She went to London with Lady Haredale for a few days during his absence, to complete these arrangements, and there, in the brief intervals when her mind was not taken up with her lover's letters, or with the engrossing business of the trousseau, she fancied that Lady Haredale was less cheery and light-hearted than usual. Her father, who was very little at Cleverley, met them in London, and disappointed her by his want of interest in her prospects, and by the captious, irritable annoyance with which he turned off any mention of the wedding. She returned to Cleverley with her mother, while Lucian was still absent, and found there Major Fowler, who had, he said, "been backwards and forwards" during Lady Haredale's absence. Amethyst's first view of the great "Tony" had been that he was a middle-aged gentleman, an uninteresting but worthy family friend.

Therefore it appeared to her quite natural that the girls should be "very fond of him," as Tory, with a wicked twinkle in her eye, declared herself to be. Amethyst herself behaved to him graciously, as a person that she expected to know

and like, but rather respectfully, as belonging to her elders.

She thought so little about him, that it was not until Lucian expressed a dislike to him, that she realized that there was something about him that she did not like herself. She was not shy; but he had a way sometimes of staring at her that made her uncomfortable, and, almost unconsciously, she held him at a distance and did not fall into the free intercourse with him practised by her sisters. Her mother called him "poor Tony," and had explained him in the following manner some time before.

"You see, my dear, the poor fellow has been very unlucky. Of course I don't enter into the questions between him and Mrs. Fowler; she wasn't a pleasant woman, and she is dead now. I'm sure he had his excuses. Besides, that is all over and done with, and I hate picking holes in people, one should take them as one finds them. This is his refuge; he is very domestic. Men are quite lost without a woman to turn to."

"I suppose he is a very old friend," said Amethyst, quite simply.

"Oh yes, darling; six or seven years I've known him. He was at Nice once with us, and he used to run down to Twickenham. But you know, as my lord is so much away, I always make a point of having the children about. That is why they have been so much in the drawing-room, and lost their schooling, poor dears!"

Amethyst blushed with a confused sense of misgiving, as her mother fixed her sweet, shallow eyes upon her. The apologetic tone seemed out of place.

Her time had been, however, too much taken up by Lucian for Major Fowler to come much in her

way, though she was glad when now, on their return from London, after an hour's chat with Lady Haredale, he went off by the train, without any definite promise of an immediate return.

Lady Haredale drew a long sigh as she watched him go.

"Things come to an end!" she said sentimentally. "Who would have thought it of poor Tony?"

"Thought what, mother?" said Amethyst.

"Ah, that's a secret! Well, it's all for the best. Nothing can go on for ever. But I don't know.—Well! I never look forward. There's a way out of everything. I never knew a bother, that I didn't see round the corner of it soon!"

Lady Haredale laughed, and Amethyst looked at her, admiring her cheery sweetness; but presently the mother's brows drew together, and she bit her lip sharply, then smiled suddenly, and, with the confidential air, which yet bestowed no confidence, said,—

"Men never believe that one has any tact at all!" and walked away.

Amethyst was puzzled; sometimes she felt as if, in addition to all other blessings, her marriage would be a refuge from a home that might have many perplexities. Her mother was occasionally mysterious. Tory threw out hints, which Amethyst did not choose to follow up. Una was ill and miserable, giving way to unexplained fits of crying, and angry when Amethyst tried to laugh her out of them.

The time of Lucian's absence seemed endless, and, on the afternoon of his return, Amethyst's spirits rose to rapturous pitch.

It was a lovely summer day, tea was laid out on the terrace. Over the grave, old-fashioned garden

was a blaze of joyous sunlight, giving it a cheerfulness that it sometimes lacked. For the high, broad cypress hedges in front of the house were continued behind it, and enclosed the garden in a square of sombre green. These living walls were as firm and regular as if they had been built of brick.

Here and there recesses were cut in them, in which benches were placed, and at intervals, and at the corners, the cypresses grew to a great height, and were cut into all sorts of fantastic shapes—pyramids, peacocks, and lyres, the pride of the old gardener, who regarded himself as their owner in a much more real sense than either tenants or landlord.

They were certainly very striking and uncommon, and formed an effective setting to the elaborate pattern of bright flower-beds into which the turf between them was cut up. Here and there, against the dark hedges, and along the terrace, were placed really graceful statues, and in the centre was a fountain of marble Tritons and dolphins, very suitable to the formal stateliness of the whole scene. Amethyst, in her prettiest dress and hat, her beauty heightened by joyous expectation, was flitting about among the flowers, picking one here and there, and chattering to Tory and Kattern. She was longing for Lucian, but in the security of her young unbroken peace it was longing, unmixed with doubt or fear. She was happy because he was coming, not fearful that he might not come.

Una was sitting on the terrace steps. Like her little sisters she wore a bright red frock striped with white, and a fantastically-shaped hat with a red bow in it. The costume, which was becoming to the children, had an odd bizarre effect on the tall

thin girl, with her masses of hair, and her melancholy eyes. Lady Haredale sat just above her, the tea-table by her side, and a French novel on her lap. She looked the picture of lazy comfort, and a very pretty picture too, with her uncovered head, as fearless as her girls of air and light, openly reading a book which most mothers, if they studied it at all, would have blushed to let their daughters see in their hands.

Presently a telegram was brought to her, and Amethyst came running up.

"Not from Lucian, mamma?"

"Oh no, my dear child. I should like to weep a little over this bit of news. Dear old Tony has been so *convenient*, and I like to have a man about the house; but, as he says, it wouldn't be right to let such a chance slip. So he's going to marry this heiress. Ah, well, it's a great sacrifice in some ways.—What's that?"

A sudden piercing shriek interrupted the sweet melancholy flow of Lady Haredale's tones. Una sprang up from the steps, threw up her arms, made a movement as if to rush away, but either fell, or flung herself down headlong, across a bed of scarlet geraniums. Tory, who had come running up to hear the news, with a watering-pot in her hand, deliberately turned, and emptied its contents on Una's head, with the result of causing her to start up, choking with sobs, half of rage, half of misery.

"Don't be such a fool, Una," said Tory, sharply. "You've known it was coming, you've always known it was no use."

Una rushed away into the house, her sobs and half-choked screams echoing as she went.

"What does it mean?" said Amethyst, appalled.

"It means," said Tory, "that Tony was always

fond of kissing us and spooning us, when he was hanging about my lady. But Una has been over head and ears in love with him ever since I can remember, and he liked it and called her his little wife, and she'd sit all day in the window watching for him, or hide in the passage waiting for a kiss."

"Oh, my dear child," said Lady Haredale, "of course Tony was only in play."

"Yes, but Una wasn't. And lately he has been trying to get her out of it. That's why she has been so miserable; only she didn't want Amethyst to know."

"It's quite absurd," said Lady Haredale, "those things should never go too far. It's quite Una's fault. I shall have to bring her out, when you are married, Amethyst, to put it out of her head. As if Tony cared for a chit like her!"

Victoria made an indescribable grimace, while Amethyst was speechless. Tory's cynical plain-speaking, and her mother's light response, turned her quite cold with horror.

"Mother, you will never let that man come here again?" she exclaimed, at length. "If he could behave so—"

"Oh, my dear child," said Lady Haredale, "it was only play.—Poor little Una will soon forget it again. It's just a little sentiment, that's all."

Amethyst turned with a start, as Lucian, for once taking her by surprise, came out of the house all eager and joyous.

"Oh, dear Lucian," said Lady Haredale, "we are quite upset! Such a sudden piece of news."

"There is something the matter!" said Lucian, with an anxious look at Amethyst, whose face was

still scared and startled, even in the midst of his greeting.

"Oh no!" said Lady Haredale. "But our dear old friend Major Fowler is going to be married. The girls are all in tears, he is *such* a loss, we can't imagine ourselves without him. I think we've all had a share in him, we don't like to give him up to an heiress. I don't know what we shall do."

Amethyst made no contradiction, but she looked at her mother with tragical eyes, hardly controlling tears of she knew not what strange distress.

"What does it mean?" said Lucian, as Lady Haredale turned away. "I don't understand."

"Don't ask," said Amethyst. "Oh, Lucian, it's like heaven to see you, and know that I belong to you,—but—but—"

"You don't belong to any one else; keep yourself quite separate. You're mine, mine only," said Lucian in the short, masterful tone peculiar to him.

"I hate that fellow," he continued, as he drew her away into the cypress walk; "he's a bad sort."

"But now he is going to be married, we shall not see anything more of him," said Amethyst.

"Have nothing to do with him. You haven't seen very much of him, have you?"

"Why, I have *seen* a good deal of him. He has been here so much; but—Lucian, I don't think I notice any one now-a-days. I'm always thinking of you."

Lucian looked down at her with eyes which, light in colour and steadfast in expression, had a peculiar unfaltering clearness, pure as crystal, but

a little hard. He was rarely tender in word or look, he showed his love for Amethyst by taking possession of her.

"No one else has any right to you," he said firmly; and, as he took her in his arms, she forgot everything that troubled her, in his kiss.

CHAPTER X.

EDEN'S GATE.

WHEN Lucian left her, Amethyst stood leaning over the stile, which, at the end of the long cypress walk, led through a little wood into the fields. She watched his brisk active movements, his tall slight figure, with a proud sense of possession. In the morning he would come back again, through the shade and sunlight of the woodland path, and if, as might be, she were watching for him, would wave a greeting where now he waved a farewell. She turned as he passed out of sight, and started to see her graceful, charming mother coming down the long walk towards her.

"My darling child," said Lady Haredale, with a little anxious frown on her sweet face, "I made the best of it just now; but I'm in mortal trouble. Will you help me?"

"Oh, mother dear, what is it?" said Amethyst, as Lady Haredale put her arm round her waist, and walked on by her side.

"Well, dear, the truth is that I owe some money. When people are in such a dreadful state of *hard-upishness* as your poor papa and I, one can do

nothing like other people. You see how careful I am about my clothes, I'm not a bit extravagant; but just a little game of cards is a most innocent diversion—when one can afford it. I know it's just the one pleasure I can't resist—my poor old daddy couldn't either—which was why your dear father only got about three farthings with me—a thing Charles has never forgiven."

"Oh, mother," said Amethyst, breathlessly, "then don't buy the velvet dress. And I would just have a plain white to be married in."

"Oh, darling, that's nothing to do with it. But I'm going to confide in my girl, and she'll keep my secret, won't she?"

"Oh, yes—yes!"

"Well, I lost some money to Lady St. George, and the awkward thing is, that she is a distant cousin of Mrs. Leigh's; as rich as Crœsus the St. Georges are really. But she hates me—always did—and lately she has made friends with Charles. I wouldn't know Charles, I think a line should be drawn, but she chose to take him up, and actually 'confided' to him my little delay. That was mean, and I hate meanness. Well, Charles and his father had one of their pleasant interviews; Charles wanted money as usual, and when my lord couldn't give it him, and complained of his constant drains upon him, he had the audacity to say that he was not the only culprit!"

"Oh, mother, can't you pay it?"

"I must, my dear child; you see poor, good old Tony has managed hundreds of little affairs for me; but now it will be different, as he has told me."

"Did *he* lend you money?"

"My dear, he was good-nature itself. Besides, one can't go oneself and sell one's poor little things.

One would be cheated, and it is so much nicer, isn't it, to leave those matters to a man to manage?"

"Won't you—ask father?"

"My dear child, no! He can't give me any money. It is you, my darling, who must help your poor mother. Will you give up your amethysts at least for a time? They are really of value."

"I would give up everything on earth," said Amethyst.

"Well then, you will make it all quite easy. I am writing a note to Tony, and you shall just direct it for me, and take it down to the post."

"Why should I direct it?"

"Why, he is staying at Loseby. Miss Verrequers, his heiress, is a connection of the Riddells, you know, our Riddells' cousins. They are there together. I don't want to appear in the matter at all, but you might be writing to him about your wedding presents. I must be most careful not to make any trouble for him, poor fellow! Miss Verrequers wouldn't understand our friendship."

Amethyst felt an instinctive shrinking from directing the letter, though she could hardly tell why. She was confused and puzzled. The whole story was so out of her experience, her mother fascinated her so much, that she could not judge the case on its own merits.

"We are going to Loseby on Thursday," she said, "to a tennis party."

"Yes, I know, that will be the opportunity for giving him the amethysts. Come, dearest, and let me give you the note. And, Amethyst, Lucian, of course, mustn't guess at this little *contretemps*. You promise?"

Amethyst shrank again. She could not have told Lucian of her mother's—what?—shame seemed

too strong a word—discredit? Yet to promise secrecy towards him went against her, but at her mother's desire, it never struck her that it was wrong.

"Yes, mamma," she said confusedly, and followed Lady Haredale into the house, directed the envelope in the modern, upright, school-girl hand, which certainly bore no resemblance to Lady Haredale's sloping penmanship, and prepared to take it to the post-office. As she came down-stairs she saw Tory standing in the hall, her legs apart and her hands behind her back.

"Amethyst," she said, "Kat and I mean you to know. It's quite true what I said just now. Una's gone nearly off her head over Tony getting married. She's a perfect fool about him. But it's his fault, he's an awful spoon is Tony. So is she; you'd better go and talk to her."

"But—she's a child," said Amethyst; so much taken aback, that she forgot that the precocious Tory was more of a child still.

"Oh—little girls are amusing. He thought it didn't matter. Una ought to have known it was nonsense."

"But mother said it was nonsense, just now —of Una's."

"Very likely. That's what she would think."

Amethyst turned and fled. She felt as if she could neither speak nor look. A horror seized her of "kind good Tony," and she ran across the park, in haste to get the note addressed to him out of her hand.

As she was about to put it into the box, Sylvester Riddell came up with a handful of letters.

"Good afternoon, Miss Haredale," he said, "I hope this lovely weather will last for my cousin's party at Loseby."

The sense of unaccustomed secrecy made Amethyst give a guilty start; she dropped the letter, Sylvester picked it up, and the address in the clear-marked writing caught his eye. He noticed it, of course, by no word or look, but her crimson blush startled him.

Why should she write to a man whom, in common with Lucian Leigh, he detested; and why, if she did so, should she look so frightened and ashamed?

She dropped the letter into the box, and with a murmured excuse of being in a hurry, went back with winged footsteps, but a heavy heart.

She took herself to task for her folly in being so much startled and upset, but the shadow of half-understood evil is very frightful to a young soul; and she turned, with almost a sense of relief, from her mother's revelations, to what she believed to be more within her comprehension, Una's "silliness" about Major Fowler.

She had, of course, seen many girls who were "silly," and meaning to scold and coax Una out of such folly, went straight up to her room in search of her, opening the door without waiting for an answer to her knock.

The girl was crouched up in a chair all in a heap, and glared at Amethyst under her hair, as if she would have liked to spring at her.

"What is the matter, Una?" said Amethyst. "Won't you tell me all about it? Why are you so miserable, you poor little dear?"

"I mean to tell you. I hate to see you think the world is all sugar, when I know it is so wicked. I'll teach you knowledge of the world."

"Well?" said Amethyst composedly, and sitting down on the side of the bed. She was too much of a modern school-girl to be easily impressed by heroics.

"My lady made a great deal of him," began Una abruptly, "because he lent her money. After he'd told *her* all about Mrs. Fowler's ill-temper he used to catch *me* in the passage and kiss me, and say he wished *I* was his little wife. He took me out long days, and people said I was so little it didn't matter. And I used to put little notes in his great-coat pocket, and he'd stick his in little corners for me. And when he sat up smoking, I'd slip out when I'd been sent to bed, and run down and have such good times. He told *me* a great deal more of his sorrows than he ever told my lady! And he'd plan how we'd be married when I was seventeen, and go in a yacht to a lovely island in the south. I was happy then; I didn't care about being married. It was just enough to love him, love him, love him! And *now*, he's been cooling off ever since we came here, and I've just been dying for him. And it's over, it's over! I won't live! I won't exist without him! I'd like to kill him. Last time he was here, he laughed and made jokes. It wasn't a joke once. He was just a fool about me then. He has sucked out my life like a vampire!"

Amethyst clenched her fingers together.

"I wish *I* could punish him!" she said. "He is a wicked man—a villain."

"Oh no, no, no!" screamed Una. "He can't help it. He's an angel, and I'd die for him this minute!" and she flung herself down on her bed, sobbing pitifully.

It came slowly over Amethyst how dreadful a story Una had been telling her, how unfortunate a fate had fallen on the poor child. Una might be naughty; but Amethyst saw dimly that no amount of "naughtiness" could bear any relation to the great injury that had been done to her by the

thoughtless mother, who had never taken care of her, and by the selfish man who, for his own pleasure, had excited her childish passion.

An instinct of pity greater than she could understand came over her; she could not speak a word of blame, but knelt down, and laid her face close to Una's, herself crying bitterly. Una nestled up to her, and sobbed more quietly, and at length Amethyst looked up.

"Now," she said, "however bad it is, we have got to leave off crying. You must go to bed, Una, and I shall see about some supper for you; *I'll* take care of you, now I know, and he shall never have anything more to do with you."

A look, which Amethyst did not follow, came into Una's eyes; but she gave a long sigh, as of relief to her feelings, submitted to Amethyst's care, and finally settled herself down to sleep, not perhaps more miserable than usual. Amethyst went away from her, and stood by the passage window in the soft evening light, looking over the grave old garden, the peaceful spot which she had rejoiced in calling "home."

Affection, emotion, the ignorance of innocent girlhood as to the proportion of one evil to another, confused her; but her brain was clear and strong, and, through all the glamour of her mother's charm, she saw the face of evil, and never, try as she would, could shut her eyes to it again.

CHAPTER XI.

AS IT LOOKED.

"OH yes, I always knew that she was Lucian's property. They were marked out for each other from the first. But no man can keep such loveliness all to himself; it is the inheritance of humanity, like the great beauties of nature. I am convinced that Amethyst Haredale is the embodiment of the ideal of our generation. Rossetti—Burne Jones—they aim at her, they cannot reach her. It does not matter whom she belongs to, she is—"

"It strikes me, Sylvester, that you are talking nonsense."

"No, Aunt Meg, not to the initiated," said Sylvester, pulling the colley's ears, and looking dreamily out at the sunny Rectory garden, one day shortly after his return home at midsummer. "There is Beauty, you know, and sometimes it takes shape. Dante had his Beatrice; Faust, or Goethe himself, sought, but never found—"

"I have always understood that Goethe was interested in several young women," interrupted Miss Riddell.

"Yes, but you see the ideal always escaped

him ; he never quite believed in it. But when one has once seen it, you know, life must be the richer and the fairer.—Eh, dad? Have you been listening?" as he suddenly met his father's eyes fixed on him over the top of the county paper.

"Yes, my dear boy, I have. But young men's ideals have been in the habit of taking shape ever since Adam woke up and saw Eve."

"Oh, a man's own ideal," said Sylvester impatiently, and colouring a little; "but I meant the ideal of the race. That is impersonal, and exists for all."

"H'm!" said the Rector. "The two ideals had a way in my day of seeming identical. I strongly suspect they ran together, as far back as Plato, and will be found in the same person, however many philosophies may succeed his."

"And I don't think," said Miss Riddell, "that that cheerful, healthy-looking girl is at all like those melancholy pictures that I see in the Grosvenor Gallery."

"Oh," said Sylvester, starting up and laughing, "there is no use in talking about the ideal to either of you."

Perhaps he had been impelled to do so, by the consciousness that his feelings concerning the engagement were watched.

He had known, as he said, from the first, that Amethyst was Lucian's property; but she had so filled his imagination, that he could not help thinking of her, and fancied he had found a way of doing so, compatible with the turn events had taken. Of course he was not quite in earnest, or rather, he hid the earnestness of which he was conscious, under a veil of fine talking.

He thought of little except of Amethyst and Lucian, but by talking of her he could prove to

himself that the thinking was not painful. No, rather it was sweet to compare her to all the fair impersonations of poetry and art.

This peculiar feeling for her was surely quite compatible with his own happiness, when she was Lucian's wife. Then came the encounter at the post-office, perplexing him extremely; so that he thought of little else, until the day arrived for the garden party at his cousin's at Loseby Hall, to which he repaired with his father and aunt, thinking only that he should there see Amethyst. The weather was fine, the gardens beautiful, and half the neighbourhood were gathered on the wide smooth lawn, or scattered about in the paths and shrubberies.

Sylvester, in the midst of many greetings, soon detected the various groups of which he was in search. Major Fowler, handsome and military, and very sprucely got up, was walking about with a pale dark young lady, not very young, nor very pretty, but dressed in a costume, the wonderful lace and embroidery of which was noticeable, even in the crowd of well-dressed women.

Mrs. Leigh as usual, elegant and appropriate, was with Lucian; and Amethyst, all white, with a large white hat, was beside him. Lady Haredale was there also, in a style which at first sight looked appropriately matronly, but which yet was like that of no other matron there. The little Leighs and Haredales were together, and Una, promoted to a long white frock, and with her hair turned up, stood by Amethyst's side, looking in air and style very like her. Sylvester went up to join them, and, as he shook hands with Amethyst, he fancied that she blushed, and that her eyes had a new expression of anxiety in their depths.

"Come, Leigh," said one of the young men of

the house, "you won't be an available bachelor much longer—so come and play tennis. Sylvester, I believe you are always lazy. Miss Haredale, will you play?"

Amethyst was not prepared to play on the present occasion, and preferred looking on. She liked to watch Lucian, who went away good-humouredly, knowing that he was by far the best player in the neighbourhood. As he moved, Major Fowler came up and introduced Miss Verrequers to Lady Haredale with great propriety, and then to all the young ladies in succession. Miss Verrequers was polite, but a little formal, and it occurred to Sylvester that she had heard a good deal about Lady Haredale, and did not intend to become intimate with her. Observant as he was, nothing struck him but that Una was an unpleasant-looking girl, as her eyes glared out under her big hat. As a cousin of the house, he had to help in getting seats for the ladies, and arranging for them to see the tennis; but Miss Verrequers did not sit down, and presently she and Major Fowler walked away towards the house.

Amethyst and Una, with other young ladies, walked up and down, and looked on. Fresh streams of guests poured out on to the lawn, till it was crowded with gay costumes, and the air filled with laughter and chatter. When Sylvester was left at leisure again after various greetings, he missed Amethyst. Lady Haredale had Una by her side, and was apparently introducing her to some friends; Lucian's set of tennis was still in progress. Sylvester strolled about restlessly, he did not own to himself that he was searching for the one figure that he could not see; but he wandered about, and turned up sunny path and shady nook, lingered in gay conservatory and

green fernery, exchanged chit-chat with numerous groups, till at last he turned to come back to the lawn through a bit of shrubbery between the house and the tennis ground. Walking in front of him, with their backs towards him, were Amethyst and Major Fowler. They were talking, or at least Amethyst listened, with a drooping head. At a side path they paused, Amethyst took something from her pocket and put it into her companion's hand. He concealed it rapidly in the breast of his coat, and after another word or two went up the path towards the house. Amethyst turned round, and saw Sylvester on the long walk some paces off. There was an indescribable look of distress and disturbance on the girl's face, but she held up her head, and walked towards him, saying with, as it seemed to him, something of her mother's smile, and a tone in her voice that he had never heard before—

"Major Fowler is in a hurry—naturally—just now. Will you take me back to the tennis ground, Mr. Riddell?"

Well, she was an acknowledged beauty, and a bride-elect, and her notice was a favour. She must have learned as much as that, since she had told him that the world was beginning for her among the Easter primroses! As she walked beside him, and they talked easy nothings, there was a dignity in her manner altogether new, which impressed him strangely, but the fearless joy that had been essential to his ideal of her was there no longer.

As they came out on to the sunny lawn, Una came up to meet them.

"Where have you been, Amethyst?" she said petulantly. "Lucian has finished playing. What have you been doing?"

"I have been in the shrubbery," said Amethyst, "—with Mr. Riddell."

As she spoke, Lucian appeared, exclaiming eagerly—

"Syl, you haven't taken her to see all the glories of the place without me? I want to show her the gold fish in the fernery."

"We haven't been looking at the gold fish," said Sylvester.

"Come then, Amethyst, I've done my duty by the tennis. Now let us enjoy ourselves."

"But I can't leave Una by herself," said Amethyst. "She is a young lady to-day, and doesn't want to go with the children."

"Will Miss Una come with me, and have an ice?" said Sylvester; and Una, not displeased by the proposal, went off willingly.

As Sylvester talked to her, with due regard to her *rôle* of grown-up young lady, and thought of what he had seen, he felt that in that short five minutes of his walk in the shrubbery, there had passed away a glory from the earth.

Una very soon had enough of Mr. Riddell, who did not greatly amuse her, and found other companions for herself, exactly when she wished to do so, without the slightest awkwardness. Sylvester's disturbance of mind took the form of disturbance of temper. The music and the ices and the gaiety annoyed him, and he was making an attempt to get out of the way of the crowd, when he met Mrs. Leigh, also alone, and, as in duty bound, asked her if she would like to come and have some fruit, or an ice.

"There are some fascinating little tables in the conservatory by the house, with fruit of the most picturesque description," said Mrs. Leigh. "If I don't make the most of my opportunities on these

occasions, I always feel that I defraud myself, and pay my hosts a bad compliment. Besides, I enjoy a talk with you, Sylvester, so if I am not keeping you from the young ladies—"

"We can discuss the young ladies," said Sylvester, "and admire them from a distance."

He and Mrs. Leigh were very good friends, and liked each other's company; but to-day he perceived that she, as well as himself, was abstracted and preoccupied—out of spirits, in fact; and he set it down to the approaching loss of her son from her family circle. He could not, however, make cheering remarks on the subject, just now; so with words that hardly touched the surface of the thoughts of either, he conducted her into the spacious conservatory which made of Loseby a show-place. It was very large and lofty, with nooks and bowers, formed of rare shrubs and creepers, and cunningly-contrived vistas, through which, framed in clematis or taxonia, part of the lawn, and long green walks leading away into the park and woods, were visible.

Sylvester found his companion a seat, and supplied her with a peach; but he had a curious feeling of something impending, of thunder about to burst. As he watched the groups passing before him, and remarked casually on them to Mrs. Leigh, he knew that he was really dreading the reappearance of the pair whom he had once before interrupted; and, as he said to himself that it was not likely that such another risk would be run, Mrs. Leigh suddenly exclaimed—

"There is Amethyst alone! What can she be doing?"

Sylvester started, as Amethyst, with a hurried step, and glancing nervously about her, came into the conservatory at the further end, and after

pausing as if in search of some one, passed out of sight behind a trellis covered with heliotrope and scarlet geraniums.

"She has gone into the house," said Mrs. Leigh; "let us join her."

She rose and followed Amethyst's footsteps round the geranium-covered trellis, behind which an open window led into a small ante-room, also adorned with flowers, and, at first sight, empty. In a moment, the white figure came again into view followed by Major Fowler. He took her by the hand, drew her close up to him, bending his face over hers, and kissed her under her hat. She clung to him for a second, then pulled herself away, and covered her face with her hands. Both moved out of sight in separate directions, and the whole thing was over in half a minute. Mrs. Leigh had stopped, with a clutch at Sylvester's arm. Now she walked hurriedly forward into the ante-room, and Sylvester, with an instinct of checking a scene then and there, dashed past her, with a loud and incoherent remark on the creepers. The ante-room was empty. Only strangers were in the drawing-room beyond. Mrs. Leigh sank down into a chair, speechless and overpowered. Sylvester was pale, he neither liked to leave her, nor to speak to her, and he suffered so much that he almost forgot her.

"Sylvester," she said at length, faintly, "I have been miserable—miserable! But such as this I never thought of."

"No," said Sylvester, stupidly, "no—of course not."

"I have been warned," said Mrs. Leigh. "I have hated the connection. I would be thankful to break off the match. But a child of eighteen! —What can I do for the best?"

"Don't say a word—don't tell Lucian now. Speak to Miss Haredale yourself alone, first. She is, as you say, a child. Major Fowler's position in the family, his engagement,—an unsuitable joke—"

"Sylvester," said Mrs. Leigh. "That was a parting with a meaning, and you know it. But of course nothing can be done to-day, and here I will save her. I will not make a scandal, but that girl shall never be my Lucian's wife."

There was relief as well as dismay in Mrs. Leigh's voice, and she stood up, and walked out again through the conservatory on to the terrace in front of the house. Lucian came hurrying across the lawn, looking perplexed and angry.

"What has become of Amethyst?" he said. "I missed her all in a moment. Has she been with you? Lady Haredale and the little girls are on the lawn."

"Amethyst has not been with me, Lucian," said Mrs. Leigh in a tone which Sylvester thought must at once have arrested Lucian's attention; but he only looked about restlessly, till round the corner of the house came Amethyst herself, walking beside Miss Verrequers, with Major Fowler in attendance. There was an anxious look in her eyes as she approached, but she was quite self-possessed, and did not look guilty.

"I have been looking for you everywhere. Where did you vanish to?" said Lucian, in a tone of boyish vexation, that sounded utterly trivial in the anxious ears of the others.

"Well, I thought that you would look for me, if you wanted me," said Amethyst; "and, you see, here I am."

It was a not unnatural girlish retort; but it

wanted to Sylvester's ear the crystal candour of Amethyst's ordinary utterances.

"I have been having the pleasure of making Miss Haredale's acquaintance," said Miss Verrequers, pleasantly.

"We are going to find my mother," said Amethyst, "because Miss Verrequers wishes to settle a day to come over to Cleverley. Will you come, Lucian?"

He walked on by her side, a little rebuked, and, as it were, kept down by her manner. But, as they all followed in a stream, Sylvester saw her turn her head aside for a moment, and a look swept over her face, of utter misery and shame, a look gone even while he noted it.

The rest of the day was for him like a miserable dream. He thought of every kind of excuse, of the free and easy manners of great houses and fashionable folk, of childish freedom, and girlish coquetry, but every theory degraded Amethyst's stately maidenhood, and none fitted the despair in her eyes. He could hardly bear his part with his father and aunt, as they went home, in the discussion of the party, and Mr. Riddell noticed his silence and preoccupation, over their evening pipe.

"Not such good company as usual to-night, my dear boy," he said.

"No, dad, I dare say not. Father," he added, as he turned to go up-stairs, "if ever you pray for your stray lambs, do so to-night. There's trouble ahead, though you might not think it."

"Ah?" said Mr. Riddell, with a long inquiring intonation. "But, Syl, I know my lambs by name, and I forget none of them; no more when their feet are in the green pastures, than when they are wandering on the mountain."

"Thank you!" said Sylvester, with unconscious fervour.

Mr. Riddell looked at him as he hurried up-stairs, and, in his prayers that night for those in trouble and distress of mind, he did not forget his well-beloved son.

CHAPTER XII.

AS IT WAS.

THE letter, which Amethyst had posted with so much distress of mind, had been answered by a little note from Major Fowler, offering to take charge of the amethysts, if they could be privately handed over to him at Loseby. He would make the opportunity, he said, if Miss Haredale would watch for indications of the right moment.

Amethyst approved of selling the amethysts, and, hateful as was the secrecy with regard to Lucian, she braced herself up to the effort, with a sense of martyrdom. Lady Haredale contrived to work on her feelings, and bewilder her mind, and would have influenced her still further, if she had understood better the views that would influence an innocent and high-minded girl. Lady Haredale, with all her experience, and all her fine ladyhood, had the delight of a school-girl in sentimental mysteries. As she believed all her relations with "Tony" to be quite innocent, not to say praiseworthy, she confided much of them to Amethyst, finding even her daughter a better confidant than no one. Otherwise, no doubt, the

affair could have been managed in a simpler fashion.

Amethyst listened, and half believed that her mother had been Tony's good angel, but that stupid conventionalities obliged all this caution. She was so much puzzled by Una, that her mother's light treatment of the matter seemed to her possibly the best and wisest. It was easier to fall back on the idea that Una talked exaggerated nonsense, than to recognize that Lady Haredale did so.

She managed, when at Loseby, to follow Major Fowler's lead with a skill and self-possession that surprised herself; and which made him smile, and think to himself that none of Lady Haredale's daughters found a little plotting unnatural.

But, when she found herself alone with him in the turfed walk, she froze up into shy dignity.

"My mother desired me to say that you had shown her so much kindness, that she ventures to trouble you once more," she said; so translating Lady Haredale's message—"Tell dear old Tony that he is always my resource, and I know he'll never fail me."

Major Fowler looked at her curiously. He did not quite see why she was put forward for what Lady Haredale must have known would be a painful interview, unless her mother thought that her fresh beauty would make him waver in his purpose, and soften what he meant to say. He did not know how far she comprehended the errand on which she had been sent. But the easiest course was to take it for granted that she understood it all as well as Una would have done, and had been chosen as a messenger because her secrecy could be better depended upon.

"You see, my dear young lady," said Major

Fowler, twirling his moustaches, as he walked close beside her, "bachelor pleasures must come to an end. I am no end grateful to Lady Haredale for all she did for a poor lonely fellow, giving one the run of the house, and treating one like a—cousin. Any little service I could render, was quite part of the plan, as you may say. But *now*—it wouldn't be possible."

"My mother understood that you consented to —to manage about the jewels," said Amethyst, abruptly.

"Your precious namesakes? Oh yes, I'll manage that little piece of business. But I am afraid the other request in her letter is—well—a slight anachronism—if you understand?"

His tone jarred intensely on Amethyst, she could not tell whether it was purposely offensive or only jesting. But she felt that he meant to make her understand—something.

"I did not know that my mother had asked you to do anything else," she said.

"No?—That she asked me once more to act as her banker? Under present circumstances I must regret to be unable to do so. Of course it's been an honour and a pleasure; but you will, I am sure, convince her ladyship, that I must resign the situation, its pleasures and emoluments, and—its responsibilities."

"But, if the amethysts are sold—perhaps she might be able to pay you the money back?" said Amethyst, with childish directness.

He looked at her scared face, he heard the distress in her tone, and answered with a different accent.

"Oh no, my dear Miss Haredale, no.—That is a closed score."

"If I could pay the money, I would not close it,"

suddenly exclaimed the girl, clenching her hands in their delicate gloves. "You—you bought the right to insult us—and—you have done harm for which no money can pay! My mother *does* believe in you," she went on—"she thinks you are very good, and that you are fond of us and a real friend. She trusted you with my little sisters, and you made jokes with them, that *you* knew were not right; and now you break it all off, because you think Miss Verrequers will blame you, if she hears. If you love her, you would like to tell her the truth. My mother is not selfish, she was glad to hear you had good fortune, though she knew that she would miss you, though she is very sorry to part with you. You should not look like that, and speak in that voice, when you speak of her to me."

"No, Miss Haredale, I should not," said Major Fowler. "Nor should you have been sent on this errand. Unselfish! Good heavens! Give me the packet, and I will make all further communications direct to Lady Haredale. I assure you—" and he looked full at the girl, and pulled his moustaches hard, while he continued—"The situation is a little unusual, but I have the very greates respect for Lady Haredale, and all her family. It's all perfectly square, I assure you. Don't distress yourself."

He bent closely over her as he took the packet from her hand, and before she could answer, they both became aware of the presence of Sylvester Riddell, and Amethyst, confused and ashamed, feeling herself to blame for losing her temper and her dignity, hardly knowing whether he was very kind or very hateful, had to pull herself together and play her part. So well she did it, that Major Fowler muttered to himself as he turned away, "That's a good girl—but she'd soon be a bad one,

if she was left to her mother." Amethyst herself was surprised to find that there was a kind of excitement in managing well, and, even when she was alone with Lucian, her feeling was rather that of pushing aside the hateful burden, than of wishing to confide it to him. She wanted to think of him, not of her life apart from him. Mutual confidence is a plant of slower growth than mutual love. Besides, though she could not have put it definitely to herself, she had an instinctive dread of his stern clear judgment, and would not have had him guess at Una's folly for the world.

The real reason, therefore, why she was unwilling to be absorbed by her lover, was her desire to keep Una out of dangerous interviews; she was uneasy if both she and Major Fowler were out of sight. It was in search of her that she came into the conservatory, and almost immediately finding Miss Verrequers, and seeing Major Fowler come forward to join her, she never imagined that Una was far cleverer than herself at such a game, and had managed a moment's fatal meeting and parting, so immediately after Amethyst had passed through the conservatory, that the two spectators, whose minds were full of the preconceived idea that Amethyst was there, and who were not accustomed to attribute so womanly an appearance to Una, never dreamed of the mistake they were making.

Conflicting feelings wound Amethyst up to a kind of defiance, and when she came home, she repeated to her mother almost word for word what "Tony" had said to her.

"Ah," said Lady Haredale, "poor fellow! He was angry because I did not speak to him myself! But I think it's right to be *so* prudent! And besides, if my lord heard about the debts just

now, he would be so angry. He doesn't mind getting into debt himself; but he does so dislike my borrowing money, even from an intimate friend."

Amethyst could have said "I am glad to hear it." She was more miserable than she knew, as she lay awake in the summer morning, thinking, not of her approaching wedding, but of the miserable complications in which she had been so suddenly involved.

Maidenly instinct, all the upright impulses of a good and truthful girl, revolted against the situation. Still, it was "mother," and perhaps things might in this one instance be different from what they seemed.

She meant to behave as usual in the morning, but the radiant happiness that had of late been usual with her, could not be assumed at will.

She went out into the garden after breakfast to gather roses, and as she walked along the path under the cypress hedge, stopping here and there to pick and to admire, a step in the wood made her start and look up. It was not Lucian, but his mother.

She crossed the stile with the slow, but secure movements of a country lady, no longer slim and active, but to whom stiles have never ceased to be familiar, and approached Amethyst, who ran to meet her with a pretty look of welcome.

Mrs. Leigh was a good woman. Deeply as she resented what she believed to be her son's betrayal, to save the reputation, and, if possible, touch the conscience of this eighteen-year-old girl, to give her every chance of explaining herself, was her firm intention. She had come herself and alone to face a most painful interview, before saying one word to Lucian on the subject.

"Oh, Mrs. Leigh," said Amethyst, "you have just come in time to have some roses!"

"I think you must know why I have come, Amethyst," said Mrs. Leigh, who was too sincere a person, and in too nervous a mood, to fence.

There was guilt in a moment on Amethyst's face, and guilt, though not her own, in her heart; for her thoughts flew to her mother's secret, innocent as she felt herself to be.

"No," she said, "but I am glad to see you."

She tried to keep her secret, and when Amethyst was in any way playing a part, she played it with her mother's soft tones and languid grace.

"Amethyst," said Mrs. Leigh, "there is no use in concealment. You shall tell me your own story; but I must ask you to explain your—interview with Major Fowler. Tell me the truth, my dear, I have come first to ask yourself. It is no hearsay, I saw your parting with him."

"I dare say you did—what then?" said Amethyst. "So did Mr. Riddell. There is nothing—what should there be to explain?"

"Yes, Amethyst, I know Mr. Riddell saw you. But oh, my dear, what if my poor Lucian had seen you then?"

"What then?" said Amethyst. She was angry; but she was still more frightened and conscious of her secret. She fancied that Mrs. Leigh had seen her give Major Fowler the packet.

"What then? Oh, Amethyst, tell the truth at least."

"You had better ask my mother. There she is!" said Amethyst.

Her manner was haughty, but it was as a sort of refuge from fear. She was still so young, and so accustomed to give an account of her conduct, that

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it did not occur to her to resent the inquiries. How she could elude them was her first thought!

"My dear Mrs. Leigh," said Lady Haredale, all smiles and pleasant greeting, "you are an early visitor. This lovely weather makes an early bird even of a Londoner like me. And here is a telegram from my lord, to say he is coming home unexpectedly to-day. I don't think I've a dinner fit for him! Lucian is not particular just at present, our scrambling meals suit him."

"Lady Haredale," said Mrs. Leigh, unable to be otherwise than formal, "I have come on most painful business. I had hoped to hear the truth from Amethyst, but perhaps, as she suggests, it is right for me to speak to you."

She had been sitting in one of the deep recesses of the hedge, and now resumed her seat, as Lady Haredale placed herself beside her, while Amethyst stood, erect and silent, fronting them both.

Lady Haredale looked at her keenly, even while she spoke in a sympathetic voice to Mrs Leigh.

"There is something the matter?"

"I must speak plainly," said Mrs. Leigh. "Amethyst's behaviour altogether puzzled me yesterday. I saw her hold a secret interview with your newly-engaged friend, Major Fowler. I saw them part with—a kiss given and taken."

Lady Haredale gave a little start.

"Oh," she said, "oh, my dear Mrs. Leigh, that was not quite right of him. He should remember Amethyst's position now. But they are all little girls to him, mere babies still. But it was indiscreet."

"Mother!" cried Amethyst, with passion such

as Mrs. Leigh's words had failed to rouse, "he never kissed me! He does not think me a little girl! It is a mistake. You did not see right," she added, turning to Mrs. Leigh and speaking with childish directness. "He did stand very near me, but, indeed, he did not kiss me!"

"I was in the conservatory, Amethyst," said Mrs. Leigh, coldly.

"But I never was in the conservatory with Major Fowler," said Amethyst. "It was not there—"

She paused, and Mrs. Leigh replied—

"Where did you go when you went through the conservatory by yourself—why were you there alone?"

"I—I was looking for my sisters," said Amethyst, with some hesitation; but Lady Haredale rose from her seat, and struck in, with an indescribable air of having the best of the situation—

"I cannot have my daughter questioned in this way, Mrs. Leigh. My girls are perfectly trustworthy. It is quite impossible that anything can have passed between Amethyst and Major Fowler of the slightest consequence. He was otherwise engaged. I hope Lucian is not jealous of a few casual words. If she met him, it was quite accidentally. Was he ever away from Miss Verrequers, Amethyst, for a moment?"

Amethyst looked at her mother, with horror in her eyes.

"He did not kiss me," she said, but in a tone that sounded forced and doubtful.

"I have gained nothing," said Mrs. Leigh, turning back towards the stile. "I came here for the best, it has been all in vain."

"I too think," said Lady Haredale, drawing

Amethyst towards her, "that enough has been said for the present. But of course, Mrs. Leigh, the subject cannot drop here."

"No," said Mrs. Leigh, "that will be impossible."

She turned away without further parting, and slowly walked down the path, and crossed the stile. Now she had to tell Lucian.

CHAPTER XIII.

IS IT TRUE?

As Mrs. Leigh moved out of hearing, Lady Haredale turned quickly to her daughter.

"Well, *did* he kiss you?" she said, eagerly.

Amethyst stared at her for a moment.

"No," she said, with neither outcry nor protest. It was worse to know her mother, than to be suspected herself. Her soul was hurt by the knowledge.

"Well, so much the better. Now you must tell me exactly what did happen—what makes that woman think so?"

"I told you, mother, I met him in that turfed walk, and he said what I told you. I gave him the packet. Mr. Riddell did see us, but I don't think Mrs. Leigh did. That was all."

"But what did she mean about the conservatory?"

"I did go through the conservatory, and through the ante-room into the drawing-room, and no one was there but Major Fowler, and Miss Verrequers came in, in a minute or two. It is all a mistake. But oh, mother, can't I tell her that I had a message from *you*?"

"No, Amethyst," said Lady Haredale, without any of her usual softness. "If you do, we shall all be ruined. They'll break off your engagement to a certainty. They're just the people who never —never would understand about poor Tony. And —and you know, my dear, I'm *always* honest. I ought to have paid those losses, and it's a story to gain in the telling. If Miss Verrequers heard some things, there'd be such an explosion. Besides, your father would be furious. Remember, I've trusted you with your poor mother's honour. We must make a story up. They must not know about Tony."

"Make up a story! But what can I tell them?" exclaimed Amethyst with incautious vehemence.

"The truth!"—and Lucian, who had sprung over the stile and flashed along the path, in a moment had seized her hands; his clear unfaltering eyes were looking into hers, his young strong voice, troubled, angered, and yet loving, sounded in her ears.

"What does my mother mean, Amethyst? what is all this?"

"I did not—oh, I did not!" gasped Amethyst, like a falsely accused child. "Oh, Lucian, don't you believe what I say?"

"Yes, yes, of course I believe it. But what do you say? What can my mother possibly be thinking of?" cried Lucian, still hasty and unrealizing.

"Really, Lucian," said Lady Haredale, "I cannot tell; Mrs. Leigh is under some extraordinary mistake. Amethyst has nothing to tell you, and I really hardly know if I can allow the subject to be dropped here. I believe that Amethyst took a turn with Major Fowler—dear old Tony—who has been like an uncle among the children, and Mrs. Leigh has made some extraordinary mistake."

"What is it, Amethyst? *You* tell me what it is,"

said Lucian, who hated Lady Haredale, and never believed a word that fell from her lips.

But his hastiness, which looked like anger and suspicion, though it was in truth passionate trouble, almost took from her breath and speech. Her face whitened, her figure swayed.

"I—I only took a turn with him," she stammered, with her eyes on her mother, "a turn in the turfed walk."

"But afterwards—" said Lucian. "No, I'll not ask you in any one's presence. Come with me, and tell me the meaning of it all."

"There's nothing else to tell you," said Amethyst, suddenly feeling that she would never dare to be alone with Lucian again.

"I don't think I ought to leave you with the poor child, while you are so unreasonable," said Lady Haredale.

"I do not choose to ask her such a question even before you," said Lucian, with dignity.

"Why, what a mountain out of a mole-hill you are making, you dear foolish boy," exclaimed Lady Haredale. "It is quite true that Major Fowler and Amethyst took a turn together, and met Mr. Sylvester Riddell. She gave him a little present the children have clubbed together to buy for him out of their own money, as a congratulation on his engagement. What was it, Amethyst?—a purse, I think? Then it appears that Mrs. Leigh saw her with him,—where was it, Amethyst?—in the conservatory?"

"No, mother, she did not," said Amethyst, who had drawn away from Lucian, and stood upright.

"Oh, my dear child, she couldn't quite invent it, I think she must have seen you. And if he had kissed you—I shall always maintain that he did no harm. *Dear old Tony!*—And an engaged man!

But if you say that Mrs. Leigh was mistaken, of course Lucian is bound to believe you."

Amethyst did not speak.

"*Could* it have been some one else—Miss Verrequers herself, or one of the little girls? Shall I call them?"

"Certainly not, Lady Haredale," said Lucian; "I want no witnesses. Amethyst will explain to *me*."

"Well," said Lady Haredale, still lightly, "I will leave her to do so. She can only tell you what I have told you now. But, Lucian, take care, —I cannot have her word doubted."

As Lady Haredale walked away, uttering the last words with a charming air of motherly dignity, Lucian turned round and gazed into Amethyst's face.

"What did my mother see?" he said, "what makes her think this? *She* always speaks the truth."

"She did not see me," said Amethyst, "with Major Fowler in the ante-room."

"Then is what Lady Haredale says true?"

Amethyst did not speak.

"There is some mystery. There is something not square somewhere. What is your mother making you do? You were not like yourself yesterday; you had been crying when that scoundrel's engagement was announced? What does it mean?"

As she was still speechless, he went on, his boyish roughness of manner ill matching the agony in his pale stern face.

"I hate mysteries. It is your duty to tell me the truth. Soon you can have no secrets from me."

"I cannot explain what Mrs. Leigh saw," said *Amethyst*, but she sank slowly down on the

bench as she spoke, for her limbs failed her. Then suddenly she sprang up, and threw herself into his arms, with one outburst of all her forces against the fate that was closing in upon her.

"Oh, Lucian, trust me, trust me; I swear to you you may."

As Lucian strained her in his arms, he felt all his convictions reeling and yielding; but the answer was as inevitable to his nature, as the appeal to hers.

"Oh, my darling—my love, I do trust you. *But you ought to tell.*"

What Amethyst might have done in another moment, convinced as she was that she ought *not* to tell, is doubtful, but, before she could speak, Lady Haredale returned, and with her Tory and Kattern.

"Oh, Lucian," said Tory, in her high drawling voice, "my lady says you think that Amethyst has secrets with Tony. So she has; she gave him a present from us. We bought him a purse with our own money. It was all quite correct, I assure you."

"Is that true?" said Lucian, abruptly. Amethyst had started up, and he saw the startled horror in her eyes.—"Madam," he said to Lady Haredale, while his young eyes flashed fire, "that is the story which was to be made up. I will leave you to improve upon it," and he lifted his hat, and dashed away almost more rapidly than he had come.

Amethyst stood for a moment motionless; then she turned to her mother, and caught both her hands.

"Mother," she cried, "your are ruining my life. I will never, never marry Lucian, while I am pledged to deceive him.—Never, not if he would marry me!"

Lady Haredale's shallow sentimental nature fairly quailed before the passion in the girl's eyes and voice, but she held to her point.

"Oh, nonsense, my dear, you are far too scrupulous. It's not your secret; we must make it right somehow. Why, there were thousands of things I had to keep secret when *I* was married!"

"Yes, mother, I dare say there were," said Amethyst, dropping her hands, and walking away across the grass.

Lucian's angry eyes had pierced her heart, but the unveiling of her sweet mother's real nature seemed to have laid it waste. Half an hour later, as she sat in her room, crushed and stupefied, not one clear thought able to lift itself up under the frightful weight, hot, eager hands caught hers, and Una's voice sobbed out—

"Oh, Amethyst, my darling Amethyst, I've ruined you; it's all my fault, I did it! Tory says so, and it's true, but if I don't deny it and deny it, it will ruin *him;* Miss Verrequers will give him up. Oh, I can't spoil his prospects. Oh, what shall I do?"

Amethyst started up. There stood Una, with a very white face and black-ringed eyes, looking, in her ordinary striped frock and long hanging hair, as unlike her sister as could well be.

"You!" exclaimed Amethyst. "What do you mean? What can you mean, Una?"

"I mean, he kissed me. It was good-bye for ever and ever—and ever—there in the ante-room; Mrs. Leigh must have seen me. Tory guessed directly, and of course she'll tell. But, if I won't own to it, they can't bring it home to him. But you—oh, my darling! Oh, what shall I do?"

That the children should be mixed up in the miserable story seemed the last drop in Amethyst's *cup.* But the sense that, helpless as she was, she

was less helpless than Una, did rouse her to some power of consideration.

"I don't think they could mistake you for me," she said vaguely.

"I was all white, and my frock was long. Some one did think I was Miss Haredale. Amethyst, I think I could do it this way. If they think he had an affair with you, that would be worse still for him. We'll go all three of us to Mrs. Leigh, and say, we're very sorry there's been a mistake, but Major Fowler always played with us, as my lady said, and that he just gave me a kiss for fun, to tease me, as I was dressed like a grown-up girl. She'll think we're forward little minxes, but she'll never think more of a child like me. I can *do* the child well enough, if I like," concluded Una with melancholy shrewdness.

"I wouldn't have you do such a thing for the world!" exclaimed Amethyst, horrified. "Besides, Mrs. Leigh wouldn't believe you; and that is not all."

"Oh no, I know there's some awful scrape of my lady's. But won't she believe about the purse either?" said Una, to whom the scheme of exciting magnanimous confession had a certain miserable attraction.

"Una!" said Amethyst, "I'd rather never see Lucian again, than have you and Tory tell lies for my sake. Oh, it is all horrible—better a thousand times lose him, than know I was deceiving him!"

"Is that true?" said Una, in a tone of intense surprise, and, as she spoke, an awful wave of self-knowledge flooded Amethyst's mind; and the nature within her, akin to the mother whom she had found out, akin to the very girl whose proposal was so shocking to her, rose up in all its strength of self-pleasing passion. Was it true? She felt as

if her own soul, and the soul of her young sister, —nay, Lucian's soul too, might depend on her answer.

"Oh, God help me! God help me!" she cried. "It shall be true! I'll join in no cheating—nor let you do things worse than you understand, for my sake. But oh, it's a dreadful world! Oh, mother, mother!" and floods of tears and choking sobs overwhelmed her.

Una twined her arms round her, kissing her, and calling her by every tender name. For a moment Amethyst held back, half shrinking from her, half feeling how unfit it was for such a child to witness her despair. But she was little more than a child herself, in extreme need of love and sympathy. She put up her cheek to Una's, and the two poor girls, victims of the sins and follies of others, clung to each other for the comfort there was no one else on earth to give them.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WICKEDNESS OF THE WORLD.

IT was no surprise to Sylvester Riddell, when, as he sat alone on that same morning, in the room appropriated to himself and his home belongings, Lucian Leigh burst in upon him, white-faced and fierce, and broke out with no previous greeting.

"Sylvester! You were with my mother yesterday. What does it all mean? What is this extraordinary delusion?"

All through the long hours of the sleepless night, Sylvester had turned over and over in his mind what answer he should give to this inevitable question. He knew what no one else knew, enough to make him certain that there was some coil around the girl, who, three months before, had seemed the embodiment of fresh, frank youth, enough to make him doubtful how far the coil was of her own twisting. He was Lucian's friend, he feared for his future, and yet, if Mrs. Leigh's eyes had not seen as well as his, he felt that he would have forsworn the witness of his own eyes and ears, sooner than betray his suspicions.

"What—what has taken place?" he said, lamely.

Lucian was in great agony of mind. Every

moment that had passed since he left Amethyst had added to the tumult within him; but he stood up straight, and spoke clearly and to the point.

"You were with my mother; I need not repeat her story. Amethyst denies it utterly. She was never there with him. But she says she took a walk with him in the shrubbery, and that you met them.—Well, I saw you with them!"

"Well!" said Sylvester, in a tone of non-committal.

"She gave him a packet. There was some mystery between them?"

Sylvester was silent, and Lucian hurried on—"Lady Haredale brought up one of the little girls to say that it was some childish present. She—Amethyst—did not confirm it, but—Oh, I cannot discuss it, or her—" stamping his foot impatiently. "But she won't speak out. It is maddening, Sylvester!"

Poor Lucian appealed for he knew not what—contradiction, advice, sympathy; and yet all the time he was fully conscious how unfit it was that he should make any appeal at all on such a matter.

"Lucian," cried Sylvester, starting up, and driving his hands into his pockets as he walked about the room, "she has got involved in some ugly coil. Take her, and ask her if it should come between you. Abide by her answer. She loves you—I know she loves you; no one could see her with you, and doubt it. Take her out of the snares. Before Heaven, I would!"

"Yes," said Lucian, after a moment's silence, "I know she loves me. But, sometimes, even then.—And oh, my God, if she did not tell me the truth! They were all lying."

He sat down on the window-seat, and stared out at the trees in the rectory garden,—delicate acacias, with their fine green leaves dancing against the blue sky. He watched them, and noticed their soft fluttering motion, without really heeding them at all. Sylvester looked at his young fair face with its set lips and contracted brows, and saw how the hand on his knee trembled.

"My mother didn't make a mistake?" he said, presently.

"No," said Sylvester.

"Lady Haredale tried to make me think it was one of the children!"

"Look here, Lucy," said Sylvester suddenly, and using Lucian's old school nickname, "the truth is your due; and, if you know the truth, you can give Miss Haredale a better chance of explaining herself. Two or three days ago I saw her post a letter to Major Fowler. It was in her writing—she dropped it, and I picked it up; she blushed, and was embarrassed. When I came upon them at Loseby in the shrubbery they were talking earnestly, and she did give him a packet. He went away and left her there, and she turned and saw me. Una came up to us in a minute, she did not tell her that she had been with Fowler."

"That disposes of the 'children's present,'" interpolated Lucian bitterly.

"After that," continued Sylvester, "as I sat with your mother in the conservatory, Miss Haredale came through it. She was alone, and looked hurried. Mrs. Leigh got up to join her; we looked through into the ante-room, and saw—a parting embrace. Afterwards we met her walking with Fowler and Miss Verrequers. She was not the least embarrassed then. There's something not explained—some secret. And even

if some childish indiscretion, some folly permitted by her mother, customary perhaps among them, has —has hampered her, Lucian, I believe on my soul she is a pure and noble creature, and she loves you—as—as no man on earth can deserve to be loved."

Sylvester spoke with passionate earnestness, heedless of the chance of self-betrayal; but Lucian never thought of him at all.

"It is either true, or false—and so is she," he said, with white lips.

"Suppose we go and talk it over with your mother," said Sylvester, after a pause, in a lame and commonplace fashion.

"I must go back, and settle it," said Lucian, taking up his hat.

They walked away through the sunny fields together, each as miserable as he well could be, Sylvester, tormented with pity and indignant pain, feeling that the innate, inherent beauty of Amethyst's soul was written in her face. She was worth trusting. And then there swept over him the thought of her mother and her elder sister, and the sad conviction that *all* the possibilities of her most lovely face were not noble ones. "Yet I would trust her, I would risk it all," Sylvester thought, with a pang that was like an inward sob, as he knew not whether he were weaker or wiser than the poor young fellow beside him, on whom the problem turned another face, and who could only feel that love however passionate, beauty however exquisite, must not be weighed in the balance with honour and truth.

As they came up the garden at Ashfield, Mrs. Leigh was standing on the terrace with a note in her hand, while two broad hats and striped frocks were disappearing down the footpath in the

direction of Cleverley Hall. As Mrs. Leigh saw the two young men coming, she retreated into the drawing-room, beckoning to them to follow her. She looked very pale and grave as she spoke to Sylvester.

"You have come to our help in this miserable business," she said. "I don't know what light, if any, is thrown on it by this extraordinary note."

The note was written in an ill-formed, girlish hand, with spelling not above suspicion.

"DEAR MRS. LEIGH," it ran, "There's no reason for Amethyst to be in a scrape. Dear old Tony has made pets of us always, and he kissed *me* in the anti-room just for a spree. He'd *never* kiss HER, I'm certain, so don't trouble yourself about it.

"Sincerely yours,
"UNA HAREDALE."

"Una!" cried Sylvester, as by Mrs. Leigh's desire he read this extraordinary production, over Lucian's shoulder. "Is that possible? can we have been mistaken?"

"I am certain of my own eyesight," said Mrs. Leigh. "This is a pretence. Lady Haredale is capable of anything; I have no dependence on a word they say."

And Lucian thought of the story of the purse, of the "Make up some story to tell him," that he had overheard—of what seemed to him the impossibility of mistaking Una for Amethyst—and was silent.

"Don't you see?" said Sylvester hurriedly, "if this is so, all the rest goes for nothing—is easily explained by some one else's secret."

"You must know whether it was Una that you saw," said Lucian, sullenly.

"Certainly it was not," said Mrs. Leigh. "Sylvester, you cannot think so."

"You might ask her face to face," he said.

"I cannot believe any of them!" said Mrs. Leigh, with agitation. "If they confuse the evidence, till proof is impossible, I shall never feel confidence again. Lucian, my dear, dear boy, it is a heart-breaking business, but oh, don't you see that it is better to be warned in time?"

"Hush, mother!" said Lucian, "not till we know. But—but I know that in justice to myself—to all of us, the truth must be made clear. But," he added again, "I was violent, and frightened her. Give me that note; I can have no one doubt that she will tell me the truth about it. I shall go to her again."

He looked very resolute and very wretched, and Sylvester felt that Amethyst's chance was small.

"I shall go alone," said Lucian, "it is my own affair, and, mother, you must trust me to judge rightly."

In the meantime Amethyst had not long remained crying in Una's arms. The instinct of self-preservation was strong within her. She would not go down in the whirlpool without a struggle. She got up and went resolutely to her mother, whom she found in her dressing-room, reading a note just received by the second post from Lord Haredale.

The mother was not very sensitive, but she could hardly fail to feel the change from the loving deference, the admiring tenderness of her daughter's manner, to the cold, sad, and half-contemptuous look with which Amethyst now faced her.

"Mother," she said, "will you let me tell Lucian that I had to communicate a family secret to Major Fowler? There is no use in pretending that there is no mystery; but I do not wish the children to tell falsehoods on my account."

"Ah, my dear child," said Lady Haredale, "innocent things like you are very hard. What is a little fib, compared to all the misery that would follow on telling the truth? I am sure I had rather tell a thousand fibs than make my darling child unhappy."

"Unfortunately, people who are accustomed to telling the truth, don't believe them," said Amethyst bitterly. "I *cannot* tell Lucian a falsehood," she added with more emotion, "nor try to make him believe what is not true, but I can keep your secret from him if I must."

Lady Haredale hesitated for a moment, and looked at the letter in her hand. Judging by herself, she did not believe for one moment, that the girl would or could be true to her in the face of Lucian's anger, and she was, in fact, in a very great difficulty.

"Amethyst," she said, suddenly rising from her seat, and putting on a grand manner, which was new to her daughter, "Lucian has behaved very ill; you are too ignorant of the world to know how much he has insulted you by refusing to believe your first denial. If he does not give in at once and entirely, without demanding any explanations at all, I shall insist on the engagement being broken off. I won't have you sacrificed to a man with a suspicious, jealous temper. And, remember, if you did tell him that you had messages from me, if he is of that nature, and once thinks you have been too intimate with poor Tony, it would make no difference, because, you know, it is no proof

against it. If he and his mother think you were indiscreet, they will think so, and never forget it."

"Then, mother," said Amethyst, with flashing eyes, "you have been very cruel to me, in setting me to do such a compromising thing."

"My darling, it is impossible to calculate on the fads of countrified and *bornés* people, like the Leighs. How could I think such ideas would occur to them?"

"I am countrified too," said Amethyst, "and I think they are quite right."

"Ah, my dear," said Lady Haredale, "you think so now. But depend upon it, you will feel differently when you are a little older. I know what it is, and Lucian and his people would make you miserable. He'll never understand you, and you would break your heart in trying to content him. I never ought to have let him have you."

"Mother, do you want us to be parted?" cried Amethyst, in despair.

Lady Haredale paused for a moment. She had often had to sacrifice a great deal to meet the exigencies caused by her own difficulties and her husband's, and now, besides the dread of exposure, there was upon her that most irresistible pressure of all, the need of ready money. The letter in her hand told her what she already partly knew, that Lord Haredale could only raise the three thousand pounds, which he was bound to produce on Amethyst's wedding-day, with the consent of his son, at great sacrifices; while, having raised a part of it, if it could only be applied to other purposes, sundry small debts of his own, and, as Lady Haredale felt, her own liabilities, could be settled off-hand, and a respite from intolerable pressure be obtained. It was, really, to this humiliating need, rather than to any misapprehension or dread

of discovery, that Amethyst's fate was owing. Under the circumstances Lucian could hardly be asked to give time for the payment of the small marriage portion. After all, he was no millionaire, Amethyst might easily marry better. No, Lady Haredale would not make that prettily-worded confession of her little plans, that half playful, half regretful acknowledgment of Una's childish folly that might have set all right. A broken engagement was nothing for a girl of eighteen, and with the quick resolution born of hundreds of emergencies, she took her line at once.

"That must depend on how far Lucian is reasonable," she said; "but, my darling, you must trust me to know what you may rightly demand of him."

"I don't think I can trust any one," said Amethyst, but, as she spoke, Tory opened the door.

"Amethyst, Lucian wants you," she said.

"I am coming too," said Lady Haredale. "It is to me that he must answer for his unworthy suspicions."

"Speak out, Amethyst," whispered Tory, as she passed her. "Don't be bullied into giving him up. What does it matter what any one knows about my lady?"

Lucian was in the library, and when he saw Lady Haredale, he stopped short in his eager movement towards Amethyst, drew himself up, and said sternly and shortly—

"My business is with Amethyst alone."

"I do not think it is, Mr. Leigh," said Lady Haredale. "You have refused to accept her word as to the nature of her interview with Major Fowler. I will not say anything about Mrs. Leigh's *extraordinary* misapprehension, or what motive she

may have had in bringing it forward; but, unless you at once withdraw all your suspicions, and apologize to my daughter for your words this morning, neither Lord Haredale nor myself will allow her to continue her engagement."

Lucian could not fail to see that this speech was intended to offend him, and, taken in conjunction with Lady Haredale's previous excuses, that it was intended to conceal the truth. He turned away from her, and caught Amethyst roughly by both hands.

"What have you to say?" he said. "You must tell me the truth. If you don't, I shall go mad. I do believe you, I will believe you, but you must speak out. You owe it to me to make everything clear."

"It can never be clear," said Amethyst. "I don't think you could trust me, and so—if that's so—we had better part."

She spoke calmly, and looked him full in the face; he showed much more emotion, turning white and red, and losing the thread of what he meant to say. He dropped her hands, and walked over to the window, leaning against the shutter for a moment or two, and trying to collect himself enough to speak. At last he turned round and said—

"I see it in this way. I couldn't stand any mystery about my wife. I should not forget it. Amethyst, tell me."

The misery of the doubt showed itself in stern displeasure. He looked so hard a judge with his clear eyes and frowning brows, that Amethyst, angered and embittered already by the dreadful experience she had undergone, felt that, having once doubted, he would never have faith again.

"Then you had better not marry me," she said.

"I think you have every right to distrust me; but since you do, I will never marry you. I dare say I am bad—or shall be; I will not injure you."

She turned and went out of the room, with a sudden movement, and in the instant's pause that followed, they heard her girlish rush up the long staircase before Lady Haredale said—

"It is your own fault, Mr. Leigh; my daughter is above suspicion."

"No, Lady Haredale," said Lucian, fiercely, "that cannot be under the circumstances. There is no more to be said."

He went out by the open window, walking with long strides across the bright sunny lawn, away from the place that had been as a Paradise to him, leaving all the trustful joy of his young life behind him.

CHAPTER XV.

ALL OVER.

MATTERS did not end at once. Interview after interview filled up the rest of that miserable day. Lord Haredale came down from London, apparently already determined to break off the engagement. Mrs. Leigh's determination went steadily in the same direction. She scouted Una's letter as a manifest falsehood, of a piece with the story of the purse, and declared that nothing would induce her to accept Lady Haredale's daughter as her son's wife. As Lucian would not own himself convinced, she proposed a private appeal to Major Fowler, but this he fiercely negatived, saying that the facts were valueless, except as coming from Amethyst herself, and also that Major Fowler could do nothing but echo the denial.

Lord and Lady Haredale declared that unless Lucian, and Mrs. Leigh also, withdrew their suspicions at once and wholly, and apologized for having entertained them, they would not allow their daughter to continue her engagement. Amethyst herself, angered and hurt, ashamed and confounded, too inexperienced to follow the dictates of the love that ought to have been

stronger than all else, wounded at Lucian's doubts, and believing that the duty of hiding her mother's disgrace came before the duty of being open with her lover, was passive and silent. Lucian, with intervals of passionate desire to give up everything rather than lose her, recurred again and again to his instinctive utterance, "She ought to tell *me*," well knowing that it was out of his power to endure the doubt that had fallen on her. So he fought back the impulse to trust her, as a temptation, and she fought back the longing to tell him, as a sin; and so, forced on by the determination of their elders, the fatal deed was completed. The packets of letters and presents were exchanged, the notes and telegrams to stop the wedding preparations were already being despatched, Amethyst had locked herself into her own room, feeling as if she could never show her face again, and Lucian, in his, was roughly throwing his things into a portmanteau, determining that months should elapse before he again saw Ashfield, if indeed he ever returned there at all, when Mr. Riddell, unluckily absent from home all day on clerical business, drove himself back in the cool of the evening in his little pony-trap, his mind recurring to his son's distress of mind on the night before. Presently he saw Sylvester coming along the road to meet him.

"Oh, father," said the young man, as the pony pulled up, "this has been a miserable day."

"What is it? Get in, and tell me about it," said the Rector.

Sylvester nerved himself to tell the story clearly.

"We did see her. I cannot think otherwise," he concluded. "But I would stake my soul on it, that there is some way out of the mystery."

"My dear boy, it doesn't do to begin married life with a mystery. Wait, and it may be solved yet."

"Her life will be ruined!"

"No, I hope not; we must try to show her kindness, to help her. But, if all had gone smooth, and she had married Lucian, who can tell how it would have been? He is a good fellow; but she—"

"She is more than good," said Sylvester, under his breath, "but—" then suddenly he flung up his head, and said passionately, "*I* would have run the risk."

"I think," said Mr. Riddell, after a moment's pause, "that I should try to look on this engagement as only delayed. If the attachment between them is of a sterling kind, it will survive much."

"I expect Lucian will set himself to get over it," said Sylvester. "He'll think it a duty."

He was pale, and had an agitated look, and his father glanced round at him for a moment.

"I *think* I should regard its renewal as still a possibility," he said. "Here is the turn to the Mount, perhaps I had better go at once to Mrs. Leigh."

"And I to look after poor Lucy," said Sylvester with some compunction.

But all the time he was wondering who would comfort Amethyst, and thinking that the woe that her beautiful eyes could express, would be deeper than Lucian's nature was capable of feeling.

Perhaps he was wrong. Lucian was incapable of speech, indifferent to sympathy. He did not care just then whether Sylvester came to him or not.

He would not let his mother say a word to him, except on the business necessary to be gone through; no friendship and no family affection could help him then. Like many happy, unemotional young people, he had taken all these sentiments for granted; the first conscious emotion he had known had been his ill-starred love, and now this love was changed into stinging, burning pain. He had once been for some shooting up to the West of Scotland, he would go there now and walk over the moors, and face it out by himself. It was impossible to oppose him, and Mrs. Leigh spared him, as much as possible, the anxious cautions which she longed to give.

Mr. Riddell attempted little but a squeeze of the hand and an earnest—

"God bless you, my dear boy, and bring good out of evil."

"Thank you," said Lucian. "I shall write, mother, and you know my address."

"Take care of yourself, my dearest boy. If you would but have let me come with you."

"I'd rather be alone. Good-bye," said Lucian.

It was not pride, struggling to control emotion, it was simple incapacity to express, almost to feel, the blow that had come upon him.

Sylvester went to the station with him to meet the evening train, for Mrs. Leigh's satisfaction, and as they walked up and down the platform, waiting for it, Lucian said suddenly—

"Amethyst is very fond of the Rector and Miss Riddell, I hope they'll go on being kind."

"I am sure they will," said Sylvester, starting at the name which had not yet had time to grow strange to Lucian's lips. "And, Lucy, any time you send me a word, I'll come to you."

"Thanks," said Lucian, "but I think I'd rather not have any one from here."

"Well—I will write if—"

"No," said Lucian, suddenly and abruptly, "I don't want to hear."

Ungracious as the speeches sounded, they did not so strike Sylvester, even though Lucian parted from him with only an ordinary hand-shake, and with no softening of eye or lip.

He went away as he had said, by himself, and spun along through the long night hours, till the morning found him in fresh air, in new scenes, all his past ruined. He walked far and fast, climbed heights, and changed from one place to another, fished by way of occupation, fell in with a reading party of old college acquaintances and joined their expeditions, got invitations for future shooting, planned further travel, wrote short letters home, never about himself. He was exceptionally strong and vigorous, so that his health did not suffer from his trouble; he turned away as much as he could, both by instinct and of set purpose, from thoughts of his past happiness, indeed he thought very little of anything; but now and then he became suddenly conscious of intense misery, and once, poor fellow, as he sat alone on the heather, found himself, before he knew it, shedding bitter tears, not called up by any special image, but by a wave of desolate feeling. His mother wrote that she trusted that he would get over it, but he could not look forward to any change in a feeling that had once possessed him. It was there; why should it alter? But he began to wonder if he ever could "do his duty," and live at Toppings by himself. What else could he do? He could not invent a new sort of life. He did not feel the least impulse to drown his

trouble in any sort of dissipation. He hated London, and gaieties, and rowdyism of all sorts. He liked a country gentleman's duties, varied with a good deal of sport. But he liked nothing now; he could not even imagine anything that he should like.

CHAPTER XVI.

BETTER.

THE last day of July had come, the day that should have been the wedding-day was over and past, the fresh green turf of the Cleverley garden was brown and dry, with long hours of scorching sunshine, the flowers looked hot and overblown in the blazing afternoon light. Some empty chairs, and a tea-table with empty tea-cups, stood on the edge of a group of trees, and on the rug in front of them lay Una in a faded shabby frock, and with a face in which there seemed to be no girlish freshness remaining. Her long hair hung heavily round her, her eyes stared wearily out of their dark circles; she had nothing to do but to play with every morbid and unwholesome fancy that can enter the brain of an ill-trained and unhappy girl.

Tony's wedding-day was fixed. He did not love *her* now. By and by, when she was grown up, she would meet him, and make him care for her again, if she didn't die first. Why not drown herself in the pond in the wood? Una pictured the plunge, the stillness, and herself and her hair floating on the top, like 'The Christian Martyr.' But Amethyst did

not love her now. How should she? Her life was a ruin too; dying would be much better for them both. Una thought again of the cool dark pond in the wood, with a sense of desire; but her exceeding weariness and languor kept her still. It was not worth while to get up, even to commit suicide.

As she lay still, getting a dreary sort of amusement out of these miserable fancies, she saw Amethyst come out of the house, walk slowly across the brown scorched grass, and sit down on one of the chairs, without noticing her sister's presence.

She sat perfectly still, with a hard unsmiling face, at variance with the gay trim dress in which she had been entertaining some recent visitors. They were gone, and she could sit still now, and think —think the bitter thoughts in which her cruel disappointment took form.

All that she had lost, still more all that she now had left, passed before her mind, and was weighed in the balance. She had no illusions now. Perhaps the bitterest drop was not so much the loss of Lucian, as the sense that he ought to have read her more truly. He himself had failed her. As for her mother, her eyes were as clear as Tory's; and her heart, how hard and bitter! And the days had to go on. It was not only that she was *not* Lucian's happy wife, she *was* Amethyst Haredale, with parents whom she despised, and a house in which no good thing could flourish; and yet, her aunt's anxious entreaty to join her as soon as she would, had no attraction for her. Religion—goodness? Mrs. Leigh and Lucian were good and religious, and had cruelly misjudged her. Were good people really much better than bad ones? She had thought herself religious; but she had got below all the religion that she had ever experienced,

and with the distrust of all earthly love, came also distrust of the Divine love, from which she had scarcely distinguished it. Amethyst was one of those, to whom trouble comes, not only in vague and overwhelming feelings, but in keen sharp thoughts; and, young as she was, her thoughts hit life's hard problems like well-aimed arrows.

"Well, Amethyst, do you think, now, there's any good in being good?"

Una's voice, with a hard ring through its weary languor, roused her with a start.

"Una! Why do you lie there in the sun? It's very bad for you!" she said petulantly.

"Suppose it is, what does it matter? There's nothing doing, and nothing worth living for, that I can see. You can't say there is."

"You ought not to say things like that, Una," said Amethyst. "It is not right."

"As if being right mattered!" said Una, and then with a sudden change the ready tears filled her eyes. "I am so—so miserable," she sobbed, "and *you* are unkind to me now, Amethyst. The children tease me, and you don't care for me now."

Amethyst looked round at her. It was quite true. She had not cared. Even now she felt impatient of the trouble that was like a caricature of her own.

"It's natural you should hate me, when I did all the mischief. But oh, I did try to make up for it—I did!"

"Nonsense!" said Amethyst. "I don't hate you, but I don't know that I can say anything to do you any good."

She started up, and walked away as she spoke, her nerves were all on edge, her temper irritated, her conscience beginning to struggle with her

sense of injury. The craving for Lucian came over her, as, with unconscious force, she said to herself, "like a flood of hot lava." How could she think about other people? She escaped from the sight of Una, and walked along the little path across the fields, towards the village. Then the place recalled the beginning of her troubles. She had come this way to post the fatal letter which Sylvester Riddell had seen. She believed Sylvester to be her worst enemy, and it was with a sense of angry recoil that she saw his father and aunt coming to meet her. What part they had taken, if any, in her affairs, she did not know, and she had seen neither of them since the party at Loseby. Probably they thought that she was a bad girl, and would show it in their manner to her. She stiffened up her head, and would have passed with a bow; but the Rector, who was nearest to her, stopped, raised his hat, and held out his hand.

"How do you do, my dear?" he said in his kindest voice; "my sister was coming to ask a little favour of you."

"It is this," said Miss Riddell, without waiting for Amethyst to speak; "I want to interest some of the young girls about here in improving their minds. There are a good many in Cleverley without much object in life; I think some of them might be encouraged to work for an examination. As your experience is so fresh, and you were so successful, I wondered if you would come to tea to-morrow afternoon, and tell us a little about it."

"So fresh!" Yes, only three months old; but what a fiery gulf seemed to roll between. Amethyst was quick enough to see that this proposal was meant most kindly as a link with her

old life, and also, to show the neighbourhood that, in the opinion of the Rectory, Miss Haredale was an example to be followed, a companion to be desired.

She hesitated and was silent.

"The kindness would be very great," said the Rector. Miss Riddell moved a little away, and he continued, "You have had a great trial, nothing seems attractive to you now. Will this be more than you are ready for?"

"I don't feel as if I could remember about it," said Amethyst, with a sudden impulse, the change in her face showing that she was still child enough to be touched by the first kind word.

"No, my dear, but don't you think it would be good for you to recall it?"

"I can't be good, I wasn't made to be," said Amethyst, in a tone which she thought was wickedly defiant, but which really showed confidence in her listener's comprehension.

"No, my dear," said the Rector again; "very few of us are. But we are all made to be a little better by effort, and prayer."

"I am *worse*," said Amethyst, tears filling her eyes, while her whole figure trembled.

"Yes, no doubt; but I think you will find it possible to make each day a little better. And I have always found it worth while, Amethyst. It makes all the difference in the long run between one man and another. I am sure there is a better and a worse before you in life, my dear, even if you think there is not a very good."

Perhaps this was the consolation of age rather than of youth. But it came to Amethyst as a truth. It might not be worth while to be a little less self-absorbed, a little less wretched; but she knew that it was possible.

"God bless you, my dear child, and good-bye," said Mr. Riddell, "you shall come or not to the Rectory to-morrow, as you like."

Miss Riddell went away with only a kind smile and hand-shake, and Amethyst, left alone, burst into a rain of tears. The kindness, the sense of trust in the speakers had been like her native tongue in a foreign land. It was natural; while her own people were strange. She remembered the kind of girl she used to be, as if her girlhood were twenty years away; bliss and misery had alike blotted it out.

But the habits and the instincts of her whole training were not utterly killed; the sense of duty began to lift its head. It was better to be kind to Una, and to show her that there was "a better" in life, than to acquiesce in her despair. It was better to read history, and to practise or to walk with the girls, than to sit alone and brood over her injuries, or to read, in the novels left about by her mother, of far worse injuries leading to worse despair, to learn from these books to what her infant passions were akin, and to bite deeper into the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge—of herself. Of course, she did not put it so. "It was better not to feel like those wicked people, at least not to think of feeling like them." And slowly and dully she turned her steps homewards through the wood; a bad way to come, since she and Lucian had loved it together. Oh, what was *he* doing? Did he feel as if life was done? Perhaps the most agonizing moment she had known, was when the conviction came to her that it was not in him to feel as she did.

"If I had thought that he had gambled or betted, or been wicked, I would have held on

tighter, to help him to be good. But he gave up *me!*"

"But if you had thought he was faithless to you?" came an answering voice in her soul. It was no thought, but an impulse of fury, that seized upon Amethyst in reply. And then—

"But I could not think so, he could not be bad, he could not be false. But oh, he is—he is—for he has no faith in me. 'Better!' There's no 'better.' If he were to come back now, if he ever finds out and believes, *I* shall never forget!"

She flung herself down on the ground, on the bank where they had sat together by the little pool where they had fished for water-lilies, where they had exchanged forget-me-nots; the very revival of spirit, caused by the friendly words, making her grief more articulate, and for the moment more bitter.

Her tears were dried up; she lay with her hands clenched in the grass, absolutely still. Suddenly a rustling, creeping sound came among the herbs and water weeds near, then panting, sobbing breath.

Amethyst lifted her head. Not twenty yards from her stood Una, her hands clasped, her eyes fixed on the water, her foot extended. Amethyst sprang to her feet, Una gave a violent start, and either lost her balance and fell, or suddenly jumped into the water.

"Una, Una!" screamed Amethyst, all else forgotten in a moment. She scrambled through the rushes, and caught at her sister's hands and dress.

Una was on her feet, the water was shallow, but the bottom was soft and muddy; she sank to her knees, and Amethyst, her own foothold insecure in the rushes, could not hold her up.

The young life woke up strong in them both, they screamed and struggled; Amethyst slipped off the bank up to her knees in the pool. As the cold water, the slimy mud, touched her feet, the warm sun struck on her head, the light and the blue of the sky were round and over her.

"Oh, God—oh, God! I don't want to die! Oh, save us! oh, save us!" she cried.

There was a ringing shout.

"Stand still—stand still! For your lives, don't struggle! It's all right, I'll help you!" And Sylvester Riddell came with a rush towards them, set his foot on a firmer tuft of rushes, grasped Una by the waist, and lifted her, sobbing and shaking, on to dry land, then pulled Amethyst out of the water, and in another moment they were safe on a mass of chervil, campion, stitchwort and sting-nettles high above the water's edge, wet and miserable, covered with mud and water-weed.

Half an hour later, Sylvester came back to the Rectory with a rapid step and brilliant eyes, but with an amount of mud on his trousers that required explanation. This he gave in rather an off-hand fashion. Una Haredale had slipped into the pond, gathering lilies he supposed, and he had helped her sister to pull her out.

"Was she hurt?" said Miss Riddell, rather curiously.

"No, but she was faint and frightened, and wet through. I helped Miss Haredale to get her home. It was an awkward accident."

It seemed, however, to have raised Sylvester's spirits, which had been down to zero of late. He was going abroad with a friend, but he had lingered and put off his start in the hope of once more seeing Amethyst, a sight which he had nevertheless

dreaded unspeakably. They had met now, with no time for resentment or embarrassment, and his one feeling was that she was now free. He saw her once again; for she came to the Rectory on the next afternoon, just as he was setting out on his journey.

The weather had changed, and the sky was grey. Amethyst wore a grey frock and hat. She was pale, and looked much less pretty than usual, and her manner was cold, and, he fancied, showed displeasure.

Sylvester's train was due, he could only shake hands and inquire for her sister.

"She was very much upset and frightened; but she has not been well lately. We must take much more care of her, then I hope she will be better."

With the last word, she lifted her eyes for a moment to the Rector's face as he stood behind his son; but they did not meet Sylvester's, and in a moment she had passed into the drawing-room out of his sight.

He thought of her, as he had seen her first with the glowing amethysts on her brow and neck, an angelic vision; at the primrose-picking, a fresh and joyous girl; when he had come home at Midsummer, happy and proud in her betrothal; at the fatal garden-party, with eyes that had fallen before his own, with a cloud of doubt on her face. He had admired her, idealized her, and, he knew it now, all the while he had loved her, and yet his fate had given him a share in breaking her heart. Now he had seen her again, pale and sad, in the light of common day.

Sylvester took his ticket for London, labelled his luggage, got into the train, and exchanged a newspaper with a friend.

But, in his heart, he vowed himself to Amethyst's service, he took her for the lady of his love, as if with her colours in his helmet, he had ridden forth to cry her name in the battle-field, and die with it on his lips.

PART II.

THE STORY: AS IT CONTINUED.

"There is passion in the place,
Power in the air for evil as for good,
Promptings from heaven and hell, as if the stars
Fought in their courses for a fate to be."

The Ring and the Book.

CHAPTER I.

"IRIS."

ONE sunny afternoon in spring, Lucian Leigh was sitting on a bench in the garden at Ashfield Mount. Nearly two years had passed since he had left Cleverley in the agony of his great disappointment, and he had now come back to it for the first time.

The flowers were as gay as when he had walked among them during the brief days of his betrothal, the house looked as cheerful and comfortable as of old; the great deer-hound that sat at his feet was unchanged during his absence, but Lucian himself had grown from youth to manhood, and though the expression of his impassive, regular-featured face had changed but little, it was so effectually bronzed, that hair, and even eyes, showed light against the sunburn.

He sat still and smoked, and patted Donald's head—he liked the feel of it—till footsteps approached, and he was hailed from the neighbouring shrubbery.

"Ha, Syl!" he said, jumping up, "so there you are. Glad to see you."

"I'm uncommonly glad to see you," said Sylvester, grasping his hand. "I began to think you were never coming home any more, but were permanently given over to tigers and elephants. Did you like India?"

"No," said Lucian, "the big game is the only thing worth going there for. I've had a shot, I believe, at everything there is there to shoot at. I know all the tracks of them, but so do so many other men. Now I think of trying bears in the Rockies for a change; and I should like to go north—an arctic expedition would be rather jolly."

"You want to add a polar bear's hide to all the tiger skins you have sent home to adorn the hall at Toppings, before you settle down to pot your own partridges."

"Yes," said Lucian.

"But what does Mrs. Leigh say to that?"

"She doesn't like it. She wants me to go to London now, and, as she calls it, 'keep up our old connection,' and then keep open house at Toppings in the autumn, have shoots, and so on. I have been there with her now, you know, for two months."

"And you don't see it?"

"No, not yet. I must, of course, finally. But Evans is a very good agent, and the Rectory people look after the tenants. I subscribe properly to everything,—schools, and hunt, and county show, and so on; but I'm not going to live there now. Why should I?"

"Well, you might see a little more of the world first, certainly."

"In two years' time Miss Carisbrooke comes of age, and the lease of this house will be up. The mother will have to make a new start somewhere

then, and it will be time for Kate, at any rate, to come out. That ought to be in our own neighbourhood, so I must be in England then."

"Does Miss Carisbrooke mean to live here?"

"I believe so. My mother had her to stay here, and liked her, before I came home. You might try your luck, Syl, she's a catch. Her only relation is a youngish uncle, her guardian. I believe he lives abroad a good deal."

Lucian paused, then said—

"She has been living for the last year with that old Miss Haredale, who lost her money. She chaperons Miss Carisbrooke, and is to bring her out, I believe, in London this year."

There was a little silence. Perhaps it had been from a kind of embarrassment that Lucian had at once rained facts upon Sylvester, and put him in possession of his intentions. Now he said—

"Don't let the mother set you on to bully me about staying at home. I always meant to have a shot at a white bear some time—except once, for about three months.—And that's quite over, for good and all. I've no more concern with it. So I must do something else, you know; and I like sport, and seeing new places."

Lucian paused again, and Sylvester looked at him keenly, hardly knowing what to say in answer.

"I am convinced," continued Lucian, with the same unmoved voice and face, "that I acted rightly. So we'll say no more about it. What have you been about? The mother says you're writing a poem."

"Yes," said Sylvester; "will you read it?"

"I'll *buy* it," said Lucian, gravely; "and, yes, I'll read it, if you like, as it's yours. I hope you'll make Tennyson take a back seat."

"Thank you," said Sylvester, laughing. "I'll be content to hang on behind his coach. But of course I'm rather full of it. I've had several things in reviews and magazines, and some men, whose word is worth something, like them. But it's all luck. The public's harder to hit than a tiger, Lucy."

"I hope it won't turn and rend you. Well, it's jolly to see you again, after all. Come in, I've got some curiosities for you—art objects, don't you call them?—to adorn your rooms at Cuthbert's."

"Thanks. And then come down and see Aunt Meg and the governor. They'll be delighted."

If Lucian had not known Sylvester from babyhood, he would have had little in common with him; but, as it was, whatever he had to say, he said to Sylvester; he took all his alien tastes for granted, and never supposed it possible to be so intimate with any one else. Absence, probably, neither made his heart grow fonder, nor the reverse; he would have given and expected exactly the same amount of regard, after an absence of five-and-twenty years instead of two.

Sylvester had other friends, and his notion of sympathetic intercourse included more than this, but he had a brotherly regard for "Miss Lucy," as the pretty-faced, but manly little boy had been called in his early school-days, and liked his company. Lucian now took him into the house, and bestowed various Indian valuables on him, stating where and when they had been bought on purpose for him, and giving him many distinct pictures of places and people; for he was very observant, and had an accurate memory.

Then, as they walked down together to the Rectory, he asked after old friends, and neighbours, till they turned into the Rectory drive,

opposite which, half open, were the great iron gates of Cleverley Hall.

"There's Aunt Meg," said Sylvester. "Who's that girl?—Good heavens," as Lucian suddenly stopped, and held him back; for there, not fifty feet from them, in the act of parting from Miss Riddell, stood Amethyst Haredale.

Retreat was for her impossible. As she turned and saw them, Lucian, without an instant's pause, raised his hat, turned and went off up a side path into the garden.

Sylvester moved forward, blushing and confused, but with an eager light in his eyes. She came straight on towards him, stopped, and held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Riddell?" she said, in soft gracious tones, like Lady Haredale's own. "I have come down for a few hours on business for my mother, and I came to see Miss Riddell. I am hurrying now to catch the London train. Good-bye."

She did not speak hurriedly, she left time for Sylvester's confused murmurs of reply between her sentences, but she had walked on and turned out of sight before Miss Riddell had time to come up to them.

"The hand of fate!" she exclaimed. "It is months since she was here, and now only for an hour or two."

"I'll find Lucian," stammered Sylvester, turning into the garden, where Lucian came quickly to meet him.

"I was told they were away," he said abruptly.

"So they are. She came down on business. She —she—"

"Don't talk about her," said Lucian, sternly. "There's the Rector, and Miss Riddell with him."

He came up to them, shook hands cordially, presented his little offerings of Indian curios, and after a very short visit, took his leave, and went away by himself.

"Unlucky!" exclaimed Miss Riddell. "I wish it had not occurred."

"But, Aunt Meg, are they coming down here?" said Sylvester, hurriedly.

"No, they are to be in London for the season, Amethyst is to be presented. I suppose their affairs are looking up. They have been abroad, you know, for some time, and visiting about; but Amethyst was in town last year for a very short time, with their cousin, Lady Molyneux, at the end of the season. You heard that? She was only there long enough to show that she would make a sensation. R——, the new artist, asked to paint her, the picture is to be in the Academy this year. She will have every chance now. She looks well, and has not lost her sweet manner, but her girlishness has all gone, and she is more the grand lady than her mother."

"I — I hardly remember what a beauty she was," said Sylvester, rather nervously. "And that fellow, Fowler, he married the heiress, didn't he?"

"Yes. They live in London. Haven't you ever met them at Loseby? The marriage turned out very well. There is something very engaging about Amethyst, and she spoke nicely of her sister Una, who is very delicate, she tells me. But, dear me, it was a bad business for Lucian. I don't know when he will settle down. His mother longs for him to marry and live at Toppings."

"He had much better see the world first," said Sylvester.

"One doesn't quite see the end of it for him,"

said Mr. Riddell, thoughtfully. "But, Syl, I thought I was to see the *magnum opus*. I like to know what you young men are doing."

Sylvester recalled himself with a start, to what had been an hour before an important ordeal to him. Now, part of the poem seemed to have come to life, and the picture faded before the original.

That same brief three months, which had turned Lucian Leigh's outward life away from the course that had seemed marked out for it, had given a colour to all Sylvester Riddell's inward existence. When he began to add another to the many poetical versions of a youth in search of an ideal, that ideal was, for him, embodied in his memory of Amethyst Haredale. He might call her Art, Truth, Womanhood, Beauty, anything he would, she looked at him from the deep grave eyes, and smiled the enchanting smile which had filled his imagination at first sight. To Lucian, every thought of Amethyst was painful, never, if possible, to be recalled ; to Sylvester, she was a dream of beauty and delight, and, as he had never seen her since the fatal summer, there was a certain dreaminess in his feelings with regard to her.

But when, encouraged by various successes in the way of criticism and of occasional verses, and having a good deal of leisure on his hands, he began to write a long poem, he had no doubt as to the source of his inspiration.

He had called his poem '*Iris*,' and the subject was that of a youth pursuing an ideal love. The hero was a minnesinger of the early middle ages, and the story was related in sections of narrative interspersed with suitable lyrics. The subject was not new, and he could only hope that the treatment was. He had not yet decided

whether Iris should be for ever unattainable, a rainbow of promise, melt mystically into his hero's being in some ineffable manner, as a final reward, or identify herself with the maiden who had been his childish friend.

But the sight of the real Amethyst had dimmed this ideal Iris, and he hardly knew whether it was as lover or author, that he blushed and hesitated as his father settled himself in his study to listen. He was so nervous that he read hurriedly and badly, and his father told him that he was not doing himself justice, and made him read a passage over again, in which Amelot, as the minstrel boy was called, played and sang to himself in the sunset, his heart full of longing to express itself in song, till, with the sweetest strains that he had ever uttered, the soft and amethystine colours of sun and air took shape and form, and the lovely eyes of Iris shone upon him, amid rainbow hues and gleaming mists, beckoning him ever onward and upward to more strenuous efforts to attain her.

"Of course," said Sylvester, hurriedly, as he paused, "I suppose he never did reach her—I think she was always the end of the rainbow."

Mr. Riddell did not appear deeply interested in this question. It did not, he said, affect the intrinsic merit of the poem.

But he pounced on the song with which Iris had inspired Amelot, and after declaring it to be smooth, and not without sweetness, tore it to pieces in its author's sight, proclaimed one epithet commonplace and another redundant, and finally told him, that he should aim at simplicity of sentiment and perfection of expression.

"What all the world can feel, my dear boy, and only you can say,—that's poetry."

"I—I am afraid," said Sylvester, "that Amelot's

devotion to Iris is rather unusual—the lot of the few. Dante is of course the eternal model, after which one can only labour."

"A case in point, Syl," said Mr. Riddell, briskly. "Thousands of young men have fallen in love, like Dante, with unattainable young women. He knew how to tell the world of it. Besides, Dante was a prophet; he had another function to fulfil. But the simplest things are the greatest."

Sylvester did not agree, he was not at all prepared to consider that the devotion of Amelot to Iris was usual; quite the contrary. It was an exceptional grace bestowed on such as could receive it.

The point was, however, rather too personal for comfortable argument. Besides, he did not know yet what his father thought about the poem.

"I gather," he said, "that you think the sentiment of the poem rather too fine-spun."

"Oh dear, no," said Mr. Riddell. "Not at all. I've often felt the sort of thing myself. I'm glad young men can still be honestly sentimental. Don't get too mystical, and avoid unusual words—all sorts of æsthetic slang. The thing has a good deal of merit in its own way. I must go down and see old Tomkins."

And while Sylvester hardly knew whether he was pleased or not, the Rector rammed on his shabby soft hat, stuck his walking-stick under his arm, and remarked—

"Glad you employ your leisure time so well. Very pretty lines—many of them—excellent tone and feeling. Of course the genuine lilt of a perfect love-song only drops from the sky once in a generation."

Sylvester had hardly expected that his father would tell him that, in Lucian's language, he had

made Tennyson take a back seat; but he felt ruffled and dissatisfied.

Sympathetic as Mr. Riddell was, he did not quite know what his verdict was to his son. He had written many a smooth and graceful copy of verses in his own young days, reflecting more or less the style and taste of his generation, and he had long survived the discovery that they had not added much to what it had to tell the world. He had found quite enough to live for, without poetry.

Sylvester was of a more intense and less many-sided nature; worthy and sufficient objects in life did not seem to him so easy to find. He had secretly lived much for his poem, and he needed to find it worth living for.

Now, the thing most worth living for seemed to be the hope of seeing Amethyst again. Fate had kept them apart hitherto by a series of chances; but now, if the poem was finished, if it came out and was a success, if he met her in London, if she did not cherish any resentment against him—if she could ever know that Iris—

So Sylvester dreamed. But Lucian went up to London to meet the friend who shared his aspirations as to the bears of the Rocky Mountains, and made arrangements for an immediate start in pursuit of them.

CHAPTER II.

GLIMPSES OF HEAVEN.

MISS HAREDALE'S pretty little drawing-room at Silverfold was gay with tulips and hyacinths, and bright with a cheery mingling of sun and fire-light.

In the sunny bay-window sat Una Haredale, with a book in her lap, but with eyes eagerly gazing down the pleasant bit of country road, shaded with tall trees and edged with broad pieces of turf and freely growing hedges, that was visible from the window.

Una was now seventeen, a slender, limp creature, with languor and want of strength apparent in every gesture, and a look of extreme delicacy in her pale face and large eager eyes. Her expression had softened and sweetened, her hair was fastened up on the top of her head, though its thick coils still seemed as if they were too heavy for the long over-slender neck. As she caught sight of a figure approaching the garden gate, her face lighted up into a look of positive rapture. She sprang up, and flew out to the door.

"Amethyst, Amethyst! my darling, my darling! Here you are at last. I'll never, never let you go again!"

The last words were spoken as she clung round her sister's neck, almost stifling Amethyst's words of greeting.

"My darling, you won't let me speak, or look at you! Where's Aunt Anna,—not at home?"

"She has taken Carrie to have a singing lesson. Come in; I am to give you tea, and take care of you."

Soon Amethyst was sitting in a low chair by the fire, with Una kneeling at her side, leaning against her, and clinging to her, as some one had once said, like bindweed round a lily, a comparison resented by Amethyst as derogatory to Una. She alone knew what this clinging, dependent creature had been to her ever since, for Una's sake, she had tried to "make things better."

"Are you quite well, dear? and do you like being here? Have you got on with Aunt Anna?" she asked, tenderly.

"Oh, as well as can be without you. I do like it. Oh! I have a great deal to tell you. Only first I want to hear how everything is settled. Is the house in Eaton Square nice?"

"Yes, there will be plenty of room for Auntie and Carrie Carisbrooke, and you know mother will let them be quite independent. And you are all to be there. Mother wouldn't hear of sending even Kattern and Tory to Cleverley; and as for you, she insisted on your going to the Drawing-room, and coming out regularly."

"I? I should be half killed with an hour of a London party. What can my lady want me for?" said Una, with a startled look.

"She says she may never be able to give you so good a chance. I said I thought that London was bad for you, and that I was sure you could not do much. But she said that it was more amusing for

you to do what you could, and she liked to have us all with her. So I must take great care of you, and we must see how it answers for you."

Una gave a long sigh.

"It keeps me with you," she said. "But oh, it tires me to think of it! and I shall want heaps of new clothes."

"Mother says you had better have them when you can. She is delighted at getting the London house."

"I dare say," said Una. "You'll see, Kattern and Tory will get everywhere, except to the Drawing-room and the stiff balls. Kat looks grown-up, and she's getting rather sweet in her own way—pretty milk-maid style, you know. And she looks best in a straw hat and pink cotton—which is cheap."

Amethyst laughed.

"I don't know about Kat," she said, "but Tory declares she's not going to spoil her chances by and by. She means to wear a sailor hat, and go to classes. She has found out some, and I do think she will, she is very clever."

Una twisted herself round so as to look up into Amethyst's face.

"There'll be the rich heiress," she said, "and the great beauty. There's only the good girl left for me! Which will win, I wonder—you or Carrie? She ought to have a poor peer, and you a rich cotton-spinner. But you might pull caps for a duke."

"He should fall to you, if you are to be the good girl," said Amethyst. "But I don't see him anywhere on the horizon at present."

"No, but the cotton-spinner? Of course the Grattons are going to be in town? In Eaton Square too, perhaps?"

"Yes," said Amethyst, "on the opposite side. Carrie is to ride with the girls."

"And you?"

"Too expensive!" said Amethyst, with an odd slow smile. "There'll be enough to contrive for without that."

"Where *is* the money coming from? Is the house all Carrie's?"

"Well, no. The fact is, father has made it up with Charles, and they have agreed to sell some farms in Derbyshire. We are to see Charles sometimes. He is going on better—"

"And is meant for Carrie! I declare, Amethyst, that's too bad!" said Una, sitting up. "And have you seen him?"

"No, and I can't recollect him at all. Can you?"

"I can. Amethyst, he's a horror! Even long ago we all hated him. I should hate him to come near you?"

"Well, Una," said Amethyst, shrugging her shoulders. "We must just do the best we can. Least said, soonest mended—as we settled long ago."

"Oh," said Una, with tears in her eyes, "it's awfully hard lines on us! I want to tell you—somehow I couldn't write. I see everything differently—since I came here—"

She broke off, and hid her face on Amethyst's shoulder.

"What is it, dear? What do you mean? Has anything happened to you?" said Amethyst, anxiously.

"The greatest of all things, Amethyst. I know about religion now—I know about *Him!* The confirmation classes, and all Mr. Ross has taught us—and his sermons—oh, it is all so beautiful. I longed, I wanted to be good. If one could go and live in a place like St. Etheldred's, out of the

temptations of the world! But yesterday he talked to us separately, and I couldn't help telling him a little, what a bad, wicked child I had been. And he said things. And somehow, last night, as I lay awake, there came the most wonderful feeling, and I knew it was all true, and that there is peace and rest. I *knew* it. One can be happy without earthly love, and—and all the things people care for. It's quite true, Amethyst, I—I saw Him right in my heart, and I *know*—"

She lifted her face, all transfigured and radiant, as she uttered the holiest of names in an awe-struck whisper.

Amethyst looked at her, with the dreaming, seeking, unsatisfied eyes which were in such curious contrast to the repose of her beautiful face.

"You knew always," said Una. "That was what made you so different to us all, when first you came."

Amethyst smiled a smile that would have been a little cynical, if it had not been so intensely sad.

"I'm not very good, darling," she said. "Life's rather a complicated business, as you know very well."

"Yes," said Una, "but I feel as if I should not mind anything very much, now. Now there is something to get back into, to hide oneself in. But it is all your doing, my jewel. What should I have been like but for you?"

Una believed, poor child, that the struggle of life was over for her, or at least robbed of all its hardness. These weeks at Silverfold had lifted her into a new world; and when, a day or two after Amethyst's arrival, the confirmation for which she had been preparing took place, the fervour of her self-dedication seemed to shine

through her, as, with a face white as her dress, but beautiful with peace and joy, she came down the little church amid the crowd of stolid white-capped country girls, experiencing a sense of ineffable rest and joy.

Was this but another and more dangerous phase of the varying emotions to which she was subject, a lifting up that was likely to end in a more violent fall?

It might be so. But, only through the higher possibilities of her emotions could salvation come to so emotional a creature; she was one to whom all good must come at risk of fatal loss.

Amethyst had no answering experience. She was a strong and healthy creature, with vigorous spirits and growing energies, which one blow could not crush. In spite of many bitter hours, she had found interests and enjoyments. Vexatious as in many ways the long months abroad with her mother had been, uncongenial as were many of the visits which she had paid with her, she enjoyed seeing new places, she made new friends, took up new pursuits, thought new thoughts.

As for home, the veil had been torn from her eyes, and she never had an illusion again. She did not make herself miserable, but she had learned to expect nothing.

She knew, as far as the London season was concerned, and the career of which she had had last year a foretaste, both that she had claims to a very brilliant one, and also that she was heavily handicapped by poverty and by want of family good repute. She thought that romance and passion were over for her, and that she was free to do the best possible for herself in life; but she meant to be honourable, upright, and modest, there were bounds that she did not intend to pass. Truly, it

was in her to be more a woman of the world than her mother, she had so much more forethought, and was so much less swayed by the pleasure and amusement of the moment.

The momentary sight of Lucian and Sylvester had brought back, not the love which she believed herself to have outlived, but a sudden realization of what that love had been, and an intense resentment against the misjudgment that had destroyed it. She hated Sylvester, and yet felt that she would have died rather than let him guess that the sight of him gave her a moment's pang.

Into her old place in her aunt's household she had never again quite fitted. She had spent some time with her after her return from abroad, but she could not take up her former life; she went back to her school as a splendid visitor, and wondered how she could have pictured herself as one of its teachers. Miss Carisbrooke, too, had in some measure taken her place. The little heiress was a pleasant-looking, round-faced, rosy-cheeked girl, with simple tastes and a warm heart. She loved her chaperon heartily, and found life at Silverfold delightful, even while she looked forward eagerly to her London season. She had an enthusiasm for Amethyst's grace and beauty, and scouted the idea that her own fortune could be a better passport to partners, a constant succession of whom was her idea of social triumph.

"You will be able to have a great many more pretty frocks than we shall, Carrie," said Una, one day when the three girls were together.

"Ah, but if I was a partner, I shouldn't think about Amethyst's frock. I wish I was a man. I would fall in love with her, and give her the most lovely flowers, and when she said yes, I would

take her to Ashfield Mount and live there. Don't you think it's a pretty place, Amethyst?"

"It is a very pretty place," said Amethyst, coolly.

"You wouldn't marry me for the sake of it?" laughed Carrie. "Nobody else shall! But I'm so glad I am going to be with you all in London. You don't know how much happier I've been since I came to live with dear Miss Haredale. She's much more like a relation than Uncle Oliver is."

"Don't you like your uncle?" asked Una.

"No," said Carrie, with some emphasis, "*I* don't, but there are a great many people who do. Don't fall in love with *him*, Amethyst; he will with you, directly he sees you."

Carrie laughed as she gave this warning; but it struck both the shrewd, observant Haredales, that she had made a point of uttering it.

"I shall take the dogs for a walk," she said, without waiting for an answer. "Poor things, they will be very dull when we are in London."

"You should go too, Amethyst," said Una, as Carrie went out; "you are pale. If you did your duty, you would be considering exactly what amount of exercise would give the right shade of pink to your cheeks."

"I shall consider nothing of the kind," said Amethyst, crossly. "Even my lady wouldn't plan and scheme in that way. At least she does things because she likes them."

"Darling, I did not mean to vex you," said Una, distressed, as Amethyst started up and went over to the window, with an impetuous movement, unlike her ordinary self-restraint.

"Oh, not you, Una. But every one plans and schemes; Aunt Annabel does. I know what all this talking about 'poor Charles' means very

well. She would do anything, in spite of all her religion, to 'support the title,' as she calls it. I'd rather live honestly for my own pleasure. But, there—we all plan and scheme, as I say, and make up our lives. And we can never make them as they were once intended to be."

Her breast heaved and her eyes filled, as the thought forced itself upon her, that, let her success in life be what it would, it could never give her anything better, anything nearly so good as one hour with Lucian in the woods at Cleverley.

"That was Paradise," she thought; "but I couldn't live in it now!"

"I'd rather be downright wicked than worldly," she said, defiantly.

"Oh, my darling," said Una, "you don't know what being wicked is like! But, Amethyst, our lives *are* made for us. That is what I have found out—made just as they ought to be."

"Oh yes, in a sense, of course," said Amethyst, "but there's a good deal of making left for ourselves and other people, and we, or they, don't make them very well."

"Yes," said Una, with shining eyes, "outside things; but not the real life, not the life within. Amethyst, the feel of that Presence is as real to me, as the feel of your arms round me when I am tired and miserable—as real, and even better. Come what may, I shall have it to remember. I know now, how the Martyrs could smile when they were burnt to death!"

Amethyst gazed at her, uncomprehending, almost wishing that Una was not going to enter on grown-up life with this new strange force within her. She recalled a saying that she had once heard Mr. Riddell quote, "that a great deal of religion needed a great deal of looking after," and she felt half

afraid. She was correct and careful in the performance of the religious duties in which she had been trained; but all the glow of feeling, with which she had knelt by Lucian's side in Cleverley Church, had departed with the earthly love from which she had hardly distinguished it.

"I'm afraid, dear," she said gently, "that Eaton Square won't be a very heavenly sort of place for either of us. If we are tied to any stakes there, no doubt we shall have to smile at them, but I doubt whether the smiles will come from heaven!"

"I shall not mind Eaton Square now," said Una.

"Well," said Amethyst, giving herself a sort of mental shake, "anyhow, we have to live there for the next three months. So we must do the best we can."

CHAPTER III.

MARSHALLING THE COMPANY.

"I NEVER did see any use in making pretences. People always see through them, and then where are you? If I did try to look as if I had thousands to spare, not a soul would believe me. Nothing answers like telling the truth."

This beautiful sentiment was uttered by Lady Haredale one bright afternoon, some few weeks after the arrival of the party from Silverfold at the house in Eaton Square.

The big drawing-rooms were flooded with all the sunlight that a spring day in London could supply, perhaps in illustration of Lady Haredale's contempt of pretences; for their handsome fittings and furniture had seen many sets of tenants for the season, and were by no means in their first freshness. But, as Lady Haredale said, "Who cared?—There were some houses, she believed, where people were asked to come and see the furniture, but she asked people to come and see herself and her girls—and they generally came."

Liberally supplied with flowers, and filled with graceful inhabitants, the effect of the shabby,

elegant drawing-room, with its open windows and fearless daylight, was not amiss.

Indeed, there was a touch of genius in the way Lady Haredale faced the situation, and, spite of the ineffaceable memories behind her, Amethyst was sometimes almost bewitched into believing her mother to be the most ingenuous of women. Lady Haredale often bought trifles for herself or for her daughters, which took her fancy, and which were always tasteful and becoming, quite regardless of the cost; but she never bought anything, or chose anything, to conceal the fact that they had less than the usual amount to spend on their clothes. She forestalled the comments of acquaintances by the simplest confession.

"You see," she would sometimes say, with her wide-open eyes and her sweet smile, "we have scraped every farthing we can get together, and joined with Miss Haredale's nice little heiress to give our girls a chance. We think Amethyst is so pretty, that it is quite a duty to make a great effort. Of course we shall have to pay for it afterwards, or perhaps we shan't.—Dear me!—one *can't* always, you know. We can no more afford, properly, to have a London season, than we can fly, but I can't sacrifice such a beauty as I think my girl is, and I've brought all her sisters to town, that they may get a little pleasure when they can. Perhaps we shall never be able to come up again. But here we are—and *so* enjoying it. We have to do it all simply, but we don't mind that the least little bit."

Simplicity is comparative, but it was quite true that Lady Haredale wasted far less regret than most women would have done, on the defects of the turn-out in which she drove in the park with her beautiful daughter.

"What does it matter?" she would say. "My lord has had good horses more than once, and every one knows that he has always had to sell them."

She did not mind wearing her dresses several times over; she knew that they always suited her. She appeared to be the least scheming of mothers, would throw over an invitation, for which many women would have plotted in vain, for another that seemed to her more amusing. She let Amethyst dance and talk with whom she would, cared little apparently where the young beauty was seen, or where she was not seen; and when Miss Haredale would have anxiously guarded Amethyst's footsteps, chosen her acquaintances, and guided her smallest actions, as she would have said "for the best," Lady Haredale observed—

"My dear Anna, you are much more worldly than I am. Let the child alone. She is getting on well enough. Let her enjoy herself, she looks much prettier when she is happy. She is getting quite enough talked about, and written about too in the Society papers. And that is the great point, you know, in getting her started."

"I should be very sorry," said Miss Haredale, "if anything came of the attentions of that Italian Prince."

"What, Prince Pontresina?—Very old family. But, for my part, I've learned prudence, and I should be very well content if she chose Sir Richard Grattan. No—I *don't* think Lord Broadstairs would do; he is nearly as badly off as we are—and a very bad character into the bargain. Amethyst wouldn't like that."

Miss Haredale sighed, and felt that she would have to swallow a great deal of old-fashioned prejudice before she could willingly see her niece marry a

man in business, whose father had got a baronetcy through being mayor on the occasion of a royal visit to his borough ; while to see her given to an old *roué* nobleman would nearly break her heart. It vexed her that Amethyst should be allowed to give up an eligible partner because Una was tired and wanted to go home, and she would much rather have taken her to a morning concert at a duchess's, than to look at pictures in an artist's studio, farther west than Miss Haredale had ever paid a visit in her life, where she saw celebrities, and was seen by them.

"They will write about her and criticize her picture, and besides, it will be more amusing," said Lady Haredale. "Take Carrie to the duchess's. —Quite the best thing for her. And as for Una, it's very pretty to see Amethyst taken up with her."

By the sunshiny afternoon on which we lift the curtain, Lady Haredale's method, or no method, had had time to work, and Amethyst's name as a beauty was being rapidly made. She had danced with princes, and been praised by painters ; her help at a coming fancy-fair, where princesses and actresses held the stalls, had been asked as a special favour, her presence and her costume was mentioned in accounts of fashionable gatherings ; all was going well, and Lady Haredale, as she said, was enjoying herself immensely.

Her endorsement of the old proverb that honesty is the best policy, though illustrated by Amethyst's career, had not, however, been intended to apply to it.

The party had come in from their various afternoon engagements. Amethyst, looking bright and fresh, and Carrie Carisbrooke, with much improved costume and manner, were touching up some

flowers at a side table, while the elder ladies rested and talked before dressing for dinner.

"You know," said Lady Haredale, "there's not the least use in making pretences about Charles. Every one knows that he has been quite a trial. Now he is going to turn over a new leaf, and I think it is quite my duty to help him, now his debts are paid."

"It's very clever of him to have got his debts paid. I can't think how he has done it," said a slow, high voice from the end of the long room.

"Tory!" exclaimed Lady Haredale, "what are you doing there?"

"I'm learning a German verb, mother," said Tory, standing up. "Don't you think that, as *our brother* is coming home for the first time, Kat and I might dine down-stairs? We won't speak unless we're spoken to."

"You had much better go up-stairs and finish your lessons," said Amethyst, who preferred Tory's absence at critical moments.

"Now don't try to suppress us, Amethyst. It isn't worthy of you. It isn't, indeed," said Tory, holding the end of her long tail of hair, and arranging the ribbon on it, with an absurdly childish look.

"Well," said Lady Haredale, "as there are only the Grattans and Mr. Carisbrooke coming, I don't see why you should not come in.—But, as I was saying, we must try to make it pleasant and home-like for Charles. He has not been all he should have been, but we must forget that."

"Yes, we know all about it, mother, all of us," said Tory,—"except Carrie."

"Carrie is one of us now," said Lady Haredale, "so we won't make a stranger of her."

Carrie, who adored Lady Haredale, smiled and coloured as she ran away to dress for dinner; while Amethyst, as she too went up-stairs, remembered the conversation they had held at Silverfold, and thought it strange that Mr. Oliver Carisbrooke and Charles Haredale should both make their first visit on the same day.

Amethyst, like her mother, was "enjoying herself very much." She did inherit the same liking for life, and for the pleasant things of life, and, in spite of the occasional pressure of the past and of the future, it was not wonderful that the present was enchanting to her. A cup, rare, sweet, and intoxicating, was held to her lips, it was something to taste so fine a flavour.

She was so full of life, that she would have enjoyed all the elements of a London season heartily, if she had been but an insignificant figure in it, and to feel herself to be one of its chief attractions, naturally enhanced the charm. While the leaves in the Park were still young and green, the air cool, and all the fine clothes fresh, the end of the season seemed far away, and the result of it needed not to be forestalled.

Neither success nor amusement ever made her forget Una, who played a much more passive part in the great Masque of Pleasure in which they were all engaged. It was for her, at any rate for the time being, an outward show. Her real life was elsewhere. This was partly, of course, because fatigue took off the edge of the pleasure, but quite as much because nothing really interested her but her emotions. She did not pass unnoticed even by Amethyst's side, being an uncommon and interesting creature, with her extreme fragility and delicacy of appearance, and absolute self-possession and indifference of manner.

She recollected, and probably knew more about, the prodigal brother than Amethyst did, and she shrank nervously from his return. Amethyst had learned to shrug her shoulders, and "make the best of a bad business." She encouraged Una, and would not let her dwell on what Tory called "the family crisis," but she was a little surprised that the two younger ones also were evidently uncomfortable, and made a point of going down-stairs under her protection.

Probably they were none of them nearly so uncomfortable as the man who had lived for years under a cloud, whose reputation was tarnished, not only in the eyes of innocent girls, but in those of the men of the world with whom he ought to have associated, whose ways of life had unfitted him for a family circle, and who knew that he was watched, criticized, and tolerated.

Charles Haredale had never dined in his father's house since his own sister Blanche had left home. He hated his step-mother, and, in blaming her for her share in the family misfortunes, eased himself a little of his self-blame. He received the kindest welcome from his aunt, who had once been fond of him, and still regarded him as the "hope" of the family, still believed that all should be pardoned to the heir.

He was meant to be an easy-going, good-natured man like his father; but his conduct had passed the bounds which he could justify to himself, his present situation contained elements difficult to swallow, and a sense of shame-faced discomfort made him look sulky.

"Here is Amethyst, Charles," said Lady Haredale, in her sweetest tones, "you have hardly seen her since she was a baby."

"Oh yes, I have," said Charles, "of course I've

seen her. Every one's seen her. Very glad to know her, I'm sure. Great privilege."

Amethyst shook hands, rather glad that this strange brother did not offer to kiss her, and he nodded shyly at the younger ones.

"Una? No—should never have known her. Oh yes—that's Tory. No mistake about her."

"You used to give me rides on your back," said Tory, in a tone that made her sisters inclined to shake her; but just then Carrie came in, trim and fashionable in blue silk, and was introduced in due form, as Sir Richard Grattan and his sister were announced.

Sir Richard was a fair, fresh-coloured man of thirty, well-dressed and well-looking. There was nothing against him in manner, character, or appearance, and his wealth was so great, that he was worthy spoil—"big game" for the beauty of the season; while it was an open secret that the beauty of the season was the prize he meant to win. He had met Amethyst at a country house in the winter, and, with the inherited energy and determination that had made his great fortune, took measures to win what, he was enough in love to know, was not to be had without trouble and pains. He had won the good will of all her family, and he did not think the lady discouraging; but he recognized that he must let her have her great success, and submit to the approach of at any rate apparent rivals.

The right of intimacy in the house was allowed both to him and to his sisters, and he took full advantage of it. He now greeted Charles, to the surprise of the girls, as an old acquaintance, with slightly patronizing friendliness, and Tory, watching with her keen eyes, caught a look, under the polite response, of savage annoyance.

"We are all here but your uncle, my dear Carrie," said Lady Haredale, glancing round.

"Perhaps he won't come. Sometimes he doesn't," said Carrie, in her clear abrupt voice.

But "Mr. Oliver Carisbrooke," chimed in with the end of her sentence, and a small slight man, with a bronzed face and a little grey pointed beard, came in. There was a little greeting and introducing, and then, men being scarce, there was a difficulty as to pairing off for dinner. Lady Haredale laughed, apologized, and went in with her two little girls. Mr. Carisbrooke was given to Miss Haredale, but Amethyst found herself on his other side, and when she turned away from Sir Richard Grattan to give him courteously a small share of her attention, making some trivial remark about the London season, he looked at her keenly for a moment, and said—

"You find it very delightful?"

Amethyst was suddenly seized with the most curious self-questioning, and felt as if she wanted to settle with herself, first of all the fact of her delight, and then the why and the wherefore of it, before she answered—as of course she did—

"Oh yes, I do indeed."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEAUTY.

A SOIRÉE was held at a new and fashionable Art Gallery, the shining lights alike of Fame and Fashion were streaming in at the doors, and spreading themselves through the rooms, when Sylvester Riddell sprang out of a hansom cab, and mounted the steps, glancing about him at the various celebrities as he passed, exchanging greetings with his friends, and watching secretly for one face.

"Iris" had just made its appearance before the public. Sylvester, at present, was suffering from a fit of depression as to its merits, and was disposed to think that it would be an utter failure. His father's criticisms rang in his ears, and were echoed by his own understanding, and he had felt himself so unable to decide as to the hero's final fate, that he had left the poem unfinished, calling it "*Iris, as far as Manifested,*" and had taken leave of Amelot, still straining after the mystic vision.

Some of his friends told him that this indefiniteness was far more artistic than a commonplace conclusion, but he knew that his father would never grant that imagination could result in vagueness. He did not think himself that it could, but for

him the story of Iris was still incomplete, and he could not decide on its outcome. Lucian was off to the Rocky Mountains; and the interest of Sylvester's life had consisted in picking up reports as to the success of the new beauty.

He was engaged as art critic to a very select and enlightened journal, hence his presence to-night, and he made his way at once to the portrait of the "Hon. Amethyst Haredale, by ——," and so encountered several of his acquaintance, all looking and criticizing, for the picture was much talked of, and was painted by a rising artist. It represented Amethyst in a simple white dress, showing the long soft curves of her neck and arms, her ideal perfection of form and feature. The head was slightly turned over the shoulder, and the eyes looked out at the spectators, with the mystical far-away look which Sylvester had caught in their depths, even in the first freshness of her happy girlhood. It was somewhat faintly coloured, less blooming than the original.

"Miss Haredale is more of a flesh and blood beauty than that," said one of the young men; "I don't see that she looks visionary at all, but as if she enjoyed herself immensely."

"That is altogether too etherealized," said another, "and misses the young lady of fashion!"

"It's a lovely picture," said a third, "like a statue with a soul—Galatea, possibly."

"Yes,—I say, just look,"—said the first. "It's ideal beauty—look at the sweep of her throat and shoulder." And he continued to call attention to the "points" of the picture, with perfectly legitimate and artistic enthusiasm, but to the distraction of Sylvester, who, on being appealed to as "a lucky fellow who knew her at home in the country," replied sharply and untruly, that the

picture did not strike him as a good likeness of Miss Haredale at all.

"No?" said another voice, as Mr. Oliver Carisbrooke came up, and joined the group. "I saw her once last year—though I had not the pleasure of an introduction. I should have thought it like her then. But she is altered. Ah, Mr. Sylvester Riddell, let me claim our slight acquaintance. Like every one else, I am admiring your poem."

Sylvester ought to have been gratified, and was obliged to be civil; but his nerves were all on edge, and something in Mr. Carisbrooke's tone jarred on him.

He glanced round at the brilliant throng, noticed the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition apparently comparing notes as to each other's portraits, saw the artist, who had painted Miss Haredale, stop and speak to a new novelist, whose book was on every one's table; and then, down the room, behind her mother, came Amethyst herself, flashing as suddenly on his vision as when first he had seen her in the drawing-room at Cleverley, with the jewels on her neck, and the happy light in her eyes.

She looked happy and eager now, the fatal amethysts were once more clasped round her throat and shining in her hair; her dress was of some faint indescribable tint that harmonized with the jewels, it hung in soft, simple folds. She carried some quaint rare orchids in her hand. Her dress was noticeable, as well as her person, and it seemed to Sylvester that she came like a queen with her court, for she was with a large party, who all made for the portrait, near which Sylvester stood.

It was neither Lady Haredale's way to resent the past, nor to slight an unprofitable acquaintance;

and, though Sylvester stepped aside, feeling acutely that she had a right to refuse to know him, she paused and said quite sweetly,

"Why, it's young Mr. Riddell! How do you do? And how is our dear old Rector, and your aunt? Amethyst—Una—Mr. Sylvester Riddell is here!"

What could be sweeter? Sylvester's friends were envious, as Amethyst turned away from the tall foreigner to whom she had been speaking, and gave her hand to Sylvester, courteously, but without the slightest effusion. She was perfectly at her ease, but he felt that she did not mean to be cordial, while he coloured and looked embarrassed, as he answered, and Lady Haredale asked him to dinner for the next day. "So lucky that we are dining at home." He accepted of course, and Lady Haredale went on talking to him; whether from mere purposeless geniality, or from a "wish to tease"—as the nursery poem has it—the other men in attendance, he could not tell. The young lady remained passive. She stood still, and gave words when they were demanded of her, "as if they had been flowers from her bouquet," thought the poetical Sylvester. When Sir Richard Grattan asked her to come and look at a landscape which he thought of buying, and to give her opinion on it, she went at once, and studied the picture, appraising its merits, and appearing genuinely to forget herself in admiring it. That was like the old Amethyst, but the action was noted, and conclusions drawn by every by-stander. The odds were certainly with Sir Richard Grattan. Sylvester managed to stand about within sight, and more or less within hearing.

"The advantage of modern pictures," said Sir Richard Grattan, "is that one knows their real value.

'Old Masters' are a mere swindle. I don't believe even the experts can tell if they're genuine."

"I like modern landscapes—they are so real," said Amethyst.

"There is a picture by Titian, as you call him, in my house in Rome," said Prince Pontresina in delicate careful English, "which was painted for my ancestor by the master himself, and we possess his receipt for the money that was paid to him."

"Oh, that is interesting! I should like to see Titian's handwriting," said Amethyst with enthusiasm.

"If I have ever the privilege of showing that precious heirloom to Miss Haredale, the moment for which it has been preserved for ages will have come. I can then destroy it," said the prince.

"Then, since you like this picture, I shall add it to the landscapes by modern artists with which I am filling the dining-room at Merrifield House," said Sir Richard. "I have secured the refusal of it. You think it good, Miss Haredale."

Amethyst stood between the two men, and glanced from one to the other, from the pale, finely-finished prince, like one of his own old pictures, to the florid, substantial baronet, who seemed to carry his prosperity written on his face.

Was she really weighing their merits in the balance? Or was she amusing herself with their pretensions, like any little suburban belle with a pair of rival partners, playing a common game with exceptionally splendid playthings?

It did not occur to the miserable Sylvester that she was actuated by another motive, that she was showing the man who had once misjudged and injured her, how little harm he had been able to do; that the person she was chiefly conscious of

was himself. He only felt that he had lost Iris, in seeing Amethyst.

She plunged into a discussion on the respective merits of ancient and modern art, in which Sylvester perceived that she talked with skill, and pulled both her admirers out of their depths. Suddenly she paused, looked across the room, with attention suddenly caught, turned to Sir Richard Grattan, and said—

"I should like to find my sister now. Will you take me to her?"

Una, dressed in pale yellow, with some large delicate daffodils on her shoulder, rather like a pale daffodil herself in her fragile slenderness, was not without admirers, but she had little attention to spare for them. To her, at any rate, the sight of Sylvester recalled the most miserable hours of her life; and, with a self-absorption and want of appreciation only possible to early youth, the thought of the conservatory at Loseby, of the pond in the wood at Cleverley, blotted out alike the brilliant people and the beautiful pictures now before her eyes. In her excuse, it may be said that she was very tired, her head and back were aching. Standing was a painful effort, so she sat down on a bench, near the rest of her party, and lost herself in wondering, whether the wretched impulse that had once driven her to plunge into the cold muddy pool from which Sylvester had rescued her, had been the unpardonable sin that she often felt it to be. How hateful were the memories of that childish delusion and folly! Her life, since then, had indeed become new.

She turned her head idly to look for Amethyst, and suddenly her heart stopped beating, and then began to throb with suffocating violence. Two figures detached themselves from the crowd, and

came towards her mother. One was an insignificant little lady, sumptuously dressed, the other, a tall man with stiff moustaches and bold outlooking eyes.

"Why, it's Tony!" exclaimed Lady Haredale, "and Mrs. Fowler too! Why, it's ages since we met! What a pleasure! How are you? when did you come to town?"

"Only last week; we have been abroad. My wife was intending to call," said Major Fowler.

"So glad to see you! Why, the little girls will be charmed! Here's one of your old playmates. You know, Mrs. Fowler, he was always the children's friend—Una."

Una rose and came forward, holding out her hand.

"How d'ye do?" she said, coolly.

Major Fowler fairly started. His mental vision of Una was so different from the reality.

"Really," he said, "I should never have known her."

"No, I've grown so much," said Una, with the languid drawl that was sufficiently familiar. "Ah, here's Amethyst."

Amethyst, feeling as if her namesake jewels burnt into her neck and arms, gave a cold, gracious greeting.

"You'll dine with us to-morrow, quite without ceremony?" said Lady Haredale. "We are in Eaton Square, you know, taking the girls out. I like it as much as they do."

Mrs. Fowler accepted the invitation, Miss Haredale and the rest of the party came up and were introduced, and then they all walked round together, looking at the people and the pictures. Sylvester, quite unable to keep at a distance, was glad to join Mr. Carisbrooke and follow in their wake.

Amethyst kept Una by her side, and Major Fowler walked with them. Sylvester caught echoes of his voice in familiar tones, which called up before him the white-robed girl in the sunny garden at Loseby, the mystery and the misery of that fatal afternoon, when the clouds had gathered round his fair ideal, and when his hateful share in her fate had been forced on him.

He was noticed himself. His tall angular figure, marked features, and fine, restless eyes were striking, and suited the author of 'Iris,' in the opinion of the literary set which was prepared to admire it, and he had his own little success on his hands, and had to reply to remarks and congratulations, which just then seemed a mere interruption to his eager watch. He caught the remarks too of the passing crowd, the wonder if Sir Richard Grattan was the accepted one, the questions as to who Major Fowler might be. He had not been seen before with the beauty. Then a laugh, and Charles Haredale was pointed out "as a reformed character," with his heiress, and Sylvester, startled, glanced at his companion. Was he really throwing his nice little niece into the arms of such a man as he must know young Haredale to be?

Mr. Oliver Carisbrooke walked calmly on, without apparently hearing the remark. He had large, and peculiarly bright eyes, which now followed Sylvester's, and were fixed on Amethyst's graceful head. Then he turned and looked at his companion.

"She will not be satisfied. She shines in these rainbow tints, but they will not be enough for her," he said, rather sentimentally.

Sylvester was startled, held for a moment by the curious gaze fixed on him, but he resented it.

"If you are speaking of Miss Haredale," he

said, "I do not see what a young lady can desire more. This sort of success is, I suppose, what women desire."

"Ah," said Mr. Carisbrooke dryly, "ah, Mr. Riddell, you keep your soul for your poem, not for real life. You write of passion, you don't believe in it."

He moved away before Sylvester could reply, and made his way into the group round Amethyst. Sylvester had no excuse for following him, and presently saw that he had engaged her attention, and was talking to her with earnestness. She turned her head, and Sylvester perceived that she was attentive, interested, and presently a bystander remarked—

"Miss Haredale is looking like her picture."

CHAPTER V.

AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW.

"AMETHYST, Amethyst, I must talk to you. I can't bear it by myself. Oh, that man, I hate and I loathe him, and my own self! But I can't get him out of my eyes or my mind, his face blots everything else out. Oh, don't make me come down to-night!"

This despairing outcry met Amethyst's ears, as, late in the afternoon of the day after the *soirée* at the Art Gallery, she came into the little up-stairs sitting-room appropriated to her sisters and herself. Una was lying on a couch by the window. She raised herself, stretching out her hands, as if for help in dire distress, and Amethyst, putting down the flowers she was carrying, came and knelt down by her side.

"Now, Una, there's a dear child, don't begin to cry about it. Of course we both hate the sight of him. But he was sure to turn up some time, and you mustn't put yourself into an agony about it."

Una hid her face in the comforting arms, the very touch of which brought strength to her.

"I was afraid you might worry yourself," continued Amethyst, "but I haven't had a chance of looking after you before. If you stay away to-night, it will still have to be done some time. Take it as easy as you can."

"I thought he had dropped my lady," whispered Una.

"Well, you know, they had some intercourse when the amethysts—Ah! talk of hating, I should like to throw them into the sea—when they were got back. It would look very odd if he cut us. And as for you, darling, you are so different now—like another person."

Una turned round and looked up into her sister's face.

"Am I so changed?" she said.

"Why, yes, no one would know you for the same silly little girl," said Amethyst, jestingly, but she felt, as she spoke, that her words gave a pang. "Change is best for us both," she said steadily, with a certain sombre look in the eyes that were bent on Una's.

Una was silent. Changed in a sense she was, for two years before she would have sobbed herself into hysterics, if half the same weight of emotion had been stirring in her breast. Now she lay still, enduring a knowledge of herself that never ought to have come to her seventeen years. The anguish that had come upon her might be shame and loathing, but it filled her soul. The face might be hateful that had once been adorable, but it blotted every other out. She had thought herself possessed by a new spirit, a holy spirit of love and peace, and behold the old possession had driven the new one away. There was a Face to which she had learned to turn, a Love she was beginning to know, and now—and *now*—

She pressed her hand on her heart, and was silent. Instinctively she felt that even Amethyst would not understand. With an effort to turn to a trouble that could be spoken of, she said—

"And Sylvester Riddell—I am ashamed to see him."

"Sylvester Riddell knows nothing about you, darling," said Amethyst.

"Amethyst, does seeing him make you—feel?"

"Oh, I don't mean to feel," returned Amethyst, lightly, "I have a great deal too much to do; let bygones be bygones. Now then, don't let us make mountains of molehills. Here is all your hair tumbling down, I'll do it up prettily. If you had any consideration for the small amount of lady's-maiding we ever get, you wouldn't grow such a quantity."

"My ridiculous hair," said Una, pulling it through her fingers, and lingering a little on the epithet. Then, with a hot blush she rose.

"Yes, it tires me dreadfully to do it myself."

A deficiency of personal attendance was one of the forms of "simplicity" with which the Miss Haredales had to put up, and both Amethyst and Kattern spent most of their leisure in "fixing"—to use a convenient Americanism—their own and their sisters' costumes. A constant attention to frills does not leave much time for feelings, but it was of set purpose that Amethyst absorbed herself in the present.

"You know, dear," she said, as she divided and twisted the long heavy lengths of Una's hair, "it is absurd to think that all one's cargo must be in one ship. No one thing is enough, and there's always something more. For instance, one can't think only of society, and of looking well. That's one thing. It's a good big thing, but there are

so many others. Now last night I should have liked to have looked at all those pictures, and talked about them to some one that understood. If I go to a concert, I feel as if there was enough in music to fill up one's life. I want to have something of it all. There's no end to the possibilities of everything. I could talk to that queer Mr. Carisbrooke for hours!"

"I wonder what Sir Richard would say if you told him that," said Una, rather dryly.

"Oh, it's only that he gave me a new idea. I want to work it out. So you see, no one thing ought to spoil everything else. Of course we're none of us likely to expect beds of roses, we've learned our lesson. But when there are so many chances, it is wise and right to take the life that offers the most—the most chances of doing, and being."

Una's hair was finished by this time, and she stood up in her long white dressing-gown, leaning her hand on the toilet-table, and looking at her sister with searching eyes.

"Amethyst," she said, "I don't believe you were ever really in love with Lucian Leigh at all."

The colour flamed into Amethyst's face, and her bosom heaved.

"Yes, I was," she said, "but that's just what I want to show you. That's over, but one isn't all heart, any more than I hope and believe one is all face. One has a mind, and a soul, and possibilities. I won't go to the bottom, if I was shipwrecked once. Nothing can ever take up the whole of one, I suppose. I thought it could then. Now if I don't get ready quick, I shall be late."

She ran away as she spoke. It was not her way to neglect the necessity of the moment, and she made such good speed, that she was in the

drawing-room before any of the guests arrived. On the table lay a thin square book bound in bluish-green, with a silver iris in the corner.

"Sylvester Riddell's poem, my dear," said Lady Haredale. "I bought it when I was out with the children. He'll like to see it on the table. Look at it, then you can talk to him about it."

Amethyst took it up, and glanced over the pages. She was a rapid reader, and in a very few minutes, she caught the idea of the poem, the passionate search for an ideal, and it attracted her. Did it contradict the philosophy which she had been preaching to Una, or was it in truth its justification? The look of interest was still on her face, the book in her hand, when its author was announced, and, when she put it down and greeted him with a delightful smile, as of one caught in the act, Sylvester felt that all the reviews in London might cut 'Iris' to pieces. She had had her day.

He sat by Amethyst at dinner, and neither prince nor millionaire was there to claim her attention. She appeared neither cold nor resentful, and that she was somewhat excited, he did not guess. Her lovely eyes, with their mysterious depths, were turned upon him, and she referred to his poem with a certain modest deference, as if in explaining it, he did her an honour. Sylvester had never known before, how utterly he had failed to express his hero's rapture, when Iris shone upon him with no cloud between.

"It is no new subject," he said, modestly, "but the idea possessed me—"

"It seems new, I think," said Amethyst, who, at twenty, had not quite exhausted all the ideas of life. "It is very interesting, but, practically, when Iris was so unattainable, don't

you think he would have managed to get on without her—by the help of his music—and his battles?"

"You see," said Sylvester, eagerly and nervously, "in a measure he found her in art, and in the struggle of life, and, in so far as she was embodied in them, she gave them value."

"I am not sure that I understand," said Amethyst, in soft considerate tones. "What is it that you intend Iris to signify?"

"She was his dream of perfection," said Sylvester, very low, "his vision—well, his Beatrice. He found something of perfect beauty in many things—when he sought it with sufficient pains, but—but love, of course, was the higher revelation. He could be content with nothing less."

"Ah, I must read to the end. Was she always an abstraction?"

"She did not always seem so," said Sylvester, as for a moment he met her eyes.

Amethyst blushed, with an inward start, she had forgotten for the moment her resentment; now came a throb of triumph. So he did not hate and despise her, this man who had thought her false to his friend. Had she conquered him too? As her thoughts glanced at the other conquest awaiting her disposal, she might be pardoned for feeling that, for her at least, life held many different possibilities.

"I don't think your father would believe in Iris," she said suddenly, with girlish abruptness.

"I am afraid he doesn't," said Sylvester. "But why do you say so?"

"He gave me some advice once, that I have found out to be true. But it wasn't at all consistent with dreams of finding perfection.—At least—after all, I am not quite sure of that."

She sat for a moment with a perfectly simple, considerate expression on her beautiful face, evidently pursuing a new idea. But she did not tell Sylvester what it was; and turned off the subject with an inquiry for Mr. Riddell and other Cleverley friends.

Meantime, it was Una's unlucky fate to find herself sitting by Major Fowler. Outwardly she was mistress of the situation, and behaved with creditable self-possession; while he talked in a good-humoured, half-joking strain, that would have been suitable enough if Tory or Kattern had been his companion. He took up the old intimacy, asked home questions as to this thing and the other, how Charles fitted in to the family circle, how "Aunt Anna" managed to hit it off with my lady, and Una answered like one under a spell. Then he began to talk about himself, praised his wife to her, said certainly he'd done the right thing, laughed a little at the way he was kept in order—all in the old way, the familiar chatter to his little sympathetic friend. It was all very natural—if only to poor Una it had not been such exquisite—rapture or anguish, she could not tell. Then he went back to an old habit of talking about herself. She was quite grown up—not a little school-girl—such a fine young lady. Somehow, he had always thought of her as a little long-haired girl. All the awkwardness was ignored, and he made their old relation seem the most natural thing in the world. The poor child's eyes turned to his, and he smiled in the half-familiar, half-flattering fashion of old times. For an instant his hand, as he poured her out some water, touched her ungloved fingers. There was storm and tumult in Una's soul, she turned her head away, and put all the distance possible into her voice. He gave an odd little

smile, took up the cue, and began to talk society chit-chat, but all the while there was an undercurrent, and Una felt that in another moment they would laugh together at the idea of making talk for each other. There was nothing else like it in the world.

The state of things at last caught Amethyst's notice, and diverted her mind from philosophy and poetry. With the manner of one from whom a word was a favour, she spoke across the table to Major Fowler, and asked him to persuade Mrs. Fowler to patronize the approaching bazaar, and so made the conversation general, for everybody began to discuss it at once.

"Shall you sell rosebuds, Miss Haredale?" said Major Fowler. "Anything, of course, for the charity."

"I shall try to do my duty," said Amethyst.

"Mr. Riddell should give us some copies of his beautiful poem," said Lady Haredale. "Get him to give them to you, Amethyst, to sell yourself!"

"I shall make a point of buying one, then, at any price," said Major Fowler.

The bazaar was a very magnificent one, the stall-holders so high in rank, that the author of 'Iris' might well have felt it a lucky chance; but to Sylvester the idea was agony.

"No," said Amethyst slowly. "Books never sell at bazaars, I can't undertake them."

"My dear child," said her mother, "you are really rude. *This* book would sell, of course."

"I couldn't sell it," said Amethyst, and Sylvester felt as if he could have gone down on his knees to her, in gratitude.

He was half-wild. The atmosphere of this London world was not pure and sweet enough to hold his Iris. Here again was this old tempter, as he believed Major Fowler to be, by her side.

Amethyst was no heavenly spirit, serene herself, to draw and influence struggling manhood; but a woman of the world, for whom an anxious lover saw many dangers, a jewel in which it was easy to find flaws, seen every moment in a changing light. She had indeed no time to dwell on one subject. A theory of life must give place to the exigencies of the bazaar. Una could only have a word and a kiss, as Amethyst hurried away with her mother to a great reception, as soon as the dinner-party was over. Sylvester Riddell had had his word and his thought. Now, on a grand staircase, amid a splendid throng of fine people, Sir Richard Grattan and Prince Pontresina were both awaiting her. She felt that the choice between Titian and the newest R. A. would soon be forced upon her, and was glad to turn to receive the courtesies of the very great lady at whose stall she was to help on the next day.

This was scarcely over, when she caught sight of the peculiar face of Mr. Carisbrooke, standing under a group of palms and other tropical plants in the corridor, at the head of the stair-case.

Her young intellect must have been vigorous and strong, her interest in new ideas very keen; for, in the midst of all the distracting whirl, her thoughts flashed back to her previous interview with him, and she made an opportunity to join him, and put her question, as if he and she had been alone in the place.

"Mr. Carisbrooke," she said, "you have set me thinking. I should like you to try your experiment. I want to know what my picture told you."

Probably, if Amethyst had not been accustomed to find her every word taken as a favour, she would not have made so abrupt a demand; but she was

quite in earnest, and stood before him as simply as a scholar before a teacher, and he answered her at once, looking straight into her eyes.

"There was the good child," he said, "there was the young fancy. They have gone by. There *is* the beautiful lady. She has pleasure and power. She will have wealth, everything that the world can give. I wonder if it will satisfy her."

"Do you think it ought to be satisfactory?" said Amethyst.

"Do you think it ever is?" he responded. "Ah! If I could have found it so! But I'm an old fellow, you know, Miss Haredale, and it is not my place to put lawless ideas into a young lady's head, or to take up her time from more worthy claimants."

"Oh," said Amethyst, as Sir Richard and his sister bore down upon them, "that is as I think. Tell us the story you were speaking of the other day, Mr. Carisbrooke. I want to hear the end of it."

Mr. Carisbrooke told a curious instance of thought transference in a pair of lovers, and told it very well. Amethyst listened with great interest, and perhaps chose to make her interest apparent, though Sir Richard repressed his impatience with difficulty.

When she found herself alone in her room that night, she stood for a moment and looked at herself in the glass. Why had she been so kind to Sylvester Riddell, when she had so much cause for righteous anger against him? Somehow, he belonged so much to days when she had felt kindly to every one, that she had forgotten to be unkind.

Yet he could look at her as he had done to-

night, and think of her—what he had made Lucian believe!

"All for my beauty!" she said to herself. "I despise him for it!" she exclaimed, half aloud. "He ought to scorn me!"

But before she went to bed, she finished his poem. It vexed and dissatisfied her. It did not seem that the hero had managed to combine success in life with the search after, much less with the possession of, Iris. And Amethyst was finding that success in life *was* a very good thing.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLAMING SWORD.

AMETHYST held many more conversations with Oliver Carisbrooke during the next few weeks, with the result that a distinct, though peculiar, relation was established between them. He was the only person she ever met — Sylvester of course having returned to Oxbridge—who had any intellectual interests, and Amethyst had so vigorous and inquiring a mind, that even fashion and frivolity could not stifle it. He gave her to understand that he was quite outside the ranks of her suitors, and only aspired to a rational friendship, and flattery of her intelligence was so much rarer, and less a matter of course, than flattery of her beauty, that it had a greater charm. He afforded an outlet to that side of her nature which could not be satisfied with the splendid outside of life.

The world was pressing hard on her soul. What had she come to London for, but to make a great marriage? Her family had made sacrifices for it, her acquaintances looked out for it, she herself intended it.

Every day made her engagement to Sir Richard

Grattan more inevitable. She liked him very well, she knew that she could make the position that he offered to her splendid, she believed that she should be happy in it, and yet she was buying it at the cost of the divine spark within her which was her very self. She believed that romantic love was over for her, and that she was no longer the kind of person to whom religion could be an inspiring enthusiasm, though she did find in it a standard below which she did not mean to fall. She thought that she had outgrown a great deal in her short life.

Rather, she had hardly begun to grow, and within her were budding impulses, the nature of which she could not yet know. She had decided that the best thing she could do under the circumstances was to marry Sir Richard Grattan, and the habit she had formed, in self-defence, of keeping to the surface of life, prevented her from realizing exactly what her resolution involved. In the meantime, Mr. Carisbrooke lent her books and discussed them, and made her, she hardly knew how, feel that she was not cut off from the other side of life. He said daring things that stuck in her memory. He, at least, was not worldly-minded.

"Oh, the hero and heroine made a wise choice, I think," he said, discussing a novel. "They had more—more life in one hour of each other, than in all the prosperity they sacrificed."

"But they did wrong," said Amethyst, who took things simply still.

"Did they? Ah, well,—perhaps that was worth while too, for each other."

It will be seen that the discussions had become of an intimate kind.

Amethyst soon found that her friend did not bear an unblemished character. She had already

learned to know that many of the men she met did not. She was told he had broken more than one heart. She smiled, and said she happily had none to break. Una, with insight sorely gained, steadily detested him. But she had no help from Amethyst in her own struggle. Her sister did not understand the hope within her, and so could not sympathize with its downfall. She merely soothed the variations of excited feeling which tried Una's strength, and would not own that there was any adequate cause for them.

That all the girl's emotions were violent and morbid was true enough, but Una was engaged in a real battle, and she did not yield herself captive.

For her misfortune, Major Fowler, who had always found her attractive, was caught again by her peculiar looks, and more developed character, and, though he meant nothing more than a renewal of the old sentimental relation between them, he inflicted agony on Una, to whom that relation had been so real a thing.

All the peace of her soul was gone, and as with her all was emotion, the struggle between right and wrong was a struggle between two personal loves. Her prayers seemed all in vain, no image but one haunted her visions, but she never forgot that the love that she believed herself to have lost, was the higher and the better thing; and, as she passed through the tormented weary days, she watched her sister, and wondered what fate Amethyst was preparing for herself.

In the middle of June there was to be a great ball at the Grattans'. Kattern and Tory had been by favour invited to it, and there were many who expected that the announcement of Sir Richard's engagement would then be formally

made. Although the need of fresh costumes was beginning to pinch the Miss Haredales, Amethyst prepared a new and becoming one for the occasion.

The day of the ball had been very hot. Una, as white as her gown, and very unfit for the exertion, was leaning back in a low chair in the open drawing-room window, resting till all the others were ready to go. Kattern, fresh and blooming, stood near her, buttoning the endless buttons of her long gloves. Tory was whisking about the room, and making remarks at intervals.

"I shall keep you in order, Kat," she said, "you don't flirt in good style. I shall tell mother to look after you."

"You know nothing about it," said Kattern, calmly.

"It's quite a family affair," pursued Tory, "even asking the children! Well, I wonder what the Leighs will think! Lucian treated Amethyst very ill. I wonder if Sylvester Riddell still thinks that Tony——"

"Tory, hold your tongue," interposed Una, with all her old sharpness, as the door opened, and in the stream of lamp-light stood Amethyst, all pink puffs and pink roses.

"Dear me, Amethyst," said Tory, "that's a new style. Looks like a new beginning."

"I had nothing else fit," said Amethyst; but the words brought back the "new beginning" made once before, and she shrank a little, at the thought of the last ball where she had given a promise to a lover.

Tory's words echoed in Una's brain. She could not dance, and she sat in a corner of the great ball-room, and watched Amethyst with anxious eyes,—her beautiful, brilliant sister, who was walking down the room with her host, and looking just a

little excited and unlike herself. Spite of herself, Una's eyes wandered round the room in search of the face that made interest and excitement for her, but instead, as if in answer to her previous thoughts, they encountered Sylvester Riddell's. He gave a little start, and came eagerly up to her.

"I am beginning my vacation with a taste of London gaiety," he said rather nervously, as he shook hands. "Can you give me this waltz?"

"Thanks, no, it is too hot for me to dance," said Una. "But will you take me out on the balcony? It is cooler there."

"It certainly is too hot for dancing," said Sylvester, as he gave her his arm, and took her out on to the covered balcony. Una sat down where the awning was lifted, so that such coolness as the London night could furnish came in over the trees of the square. Sylvester stood near her, where he could look into the lighted ball-room, secretly impatient at being kept away from it.

"Mr. Riddell," said Una, in her slow, self-possessed tones, "I want to speak to you. I have something on my mind. I don't wish any one to be under a mistake about my sister. Perhaps you'll think it doesn't matter now. But you did not see Amethyst in the conservatory at Loseby. You made a mistake, as I said then. You saw me. Of course there was a mystery. It doesn't matter a bit now what it was. My mother gave her a message for Major Fowler; there was trouble about money. Amethyst knew nothing of such things, and it made her ashamed, and that made her odd. You were all mistaken."

Surprise, and Una's composure of manner, kept Sylvester silent till she paused, and he said, hurriedly—

"I have long thought—long known, that, what-

ever the facts were, Miss Haredale was—was above—that nothing could cast a shadow on her."

"I suppose she was judged by the facts," said Una, "or by the mistakes about them. It was just as I say."

"Is—is she—is she going to marry Grattan?" cried Sylvester, hardly knowing what he said.

"I suppose every one will know soon," said Una, diplomatically; but he went on, as if he had not heard her.

"That should be nothing to me; but, Miss Haredale—it is no amends for my blind and senseless folly, nothing to set against an hour of the pain I helped to cause her;—but it is impossible that, either then or now, she can be as much to any one as she is, and ever will be, to me. Take that for what it is worth. Tell her, if she cares to know. I suppose she detests me. Let her at least know that she is my queen."

Carried away by the sudden rush of his own emotion, Sylvester had paid no heed to Una, nor noticed how her heart was throbbing beneath her little white bodice; but now, she made a little movement.

"Mr. Riddell—I am faint—I want some water—my sister—"

She looked deadly white in the half light of the balcony, as she lay back in her chair, and Sylvester rushed back into the ball-room, where, through the crowd of dancers, he made his way to Amethyst, who stood by Sir Richard's side. He was speaking low and earnestly.

"Miss Haredale, excuse me, your sister is faint, she asked for you."

"Una? Where is she?" said Amethyst, starting from her attentive attitude, and hurrying forward. Sir Richard followed her, and Sylvester, indicating

the balcony where he had left Una, went in search of ice and wine for her.

Meanwhile, as Una, too faint to think of what had passed, was lying back, with closed eyes and panting breath, the two or three minutes during which she was left alone seemed to her endless. Would Amethyst never come?

Suddenly an arm was put round her, and a voice whispered tenderly.

"Una? What, taken bad, my poor little girl? Never mind, it's only old Tony—you know I always take care of my little wifie."

The words penetrated to Una's swimming brain. To drop her head on his shoulder, and rest in his arms! How could she help it! But his last word, the pet name that had been the joy and the sting of her old relation to him, spoken in that half-caressing, half-jocose accent, roused in her the passion that was so much more than the equivalent of jesting sentiment.

"How dare you make jokes, now?" she said, panting, as she started to her feet.

"Don't you know that I daren't do anything else?" cried Major Fowler, suddenly and savagely, his eyes opening wide upon her with new force and fervour. "But this once more—Una—kiss me!"

"Oh—God help me!" gasped Una; and she tore herself out of his arms, and fell up against Amethyst, who came running out on to the balcony and caught her, guiding her as she sank to the ground.

There was instantly a bustle and confusion, and the balcony was full of figures,—Lady Haredale, Miss Grattan, and Sylvester, who came back with the remedies he had been to seek. He held the bowl of ice, while Amethyst dipped her handkerchief into it to bathe Una's face, and then, as she

revived, he helped Sir Richard to lift her on to a couch.

"She's coming round," said Major Fowler. "Poor child, the room was hot—"

Amethyst turned and faced him, as it seemed to the newly enlightened Sylvester, like a flame.

"Please find the carriage," she said. And then there was a murmur—Lady Haredale desiring Amethyst to stay, she would take Una home, Kattern should go and help her,—Amethyst must not lose her ball.

"No, mother—I shall go with Una," said Amethyst, "I could not stay, when she is ill."

Major Fowler reappeared, having caught an arriving carriage, and Sir Richard offered to carry Una; but she struggled to her feet, clinging to her sister, and said that she could walk now.

He walked by her side, helping her, and Sylvester found their cloaks, and, as he brought them to the foot of the stairs, caught a murmur of "sweetest sisterly affection," and "But you *have* answered me!"

"No—Sir Richard, I have not," said Amethyst, provoked at being urged at such a moment; and, while she spoke, her eyes looked out at the door, as Oliver Carisbrooke came in from the darkness without.

He went swiftly up to the group approaching him.

"I knew," he said to Amethyst in a low voice, "I knew this night would bring you trouble."

How it was, Sylvester never knew, but somehow it was the new-comer who took the first place, and helped them into the carriage, though Sir Richard, as in duty bound, sprang up on to the box—"to see them home."

Sylvester walked slowly up-stairs, and back to the

balcony. There, on the floor, lay Amethyst's long pink glove, which she had pulled off while waiting on Una.

Sylvester picked it up, and held it reverently in his hand.

"No, Mr. Riddell," and he started violently as Tory stood looking at him with her wicked eyes. "No, please don't, it's very expensive, and it matches her gown exactly. Please get something else, and give that to me."

Sylvester coloured, and laughed rather foolishly, restoring the glove to Tory with an elaborate bow. Then,—for what was there now to keep him at the ball?—he went away as soon as possible, back to the lodgings which he usually occupied when in town.

Amethyst meanwhile, disregarding Una's entreaty that she would go back to the ball, hastily divested herself of her finery, and came back in her white dressing-gown to her sister's side.

"Are you quite comfortable now, my darling? What was I thinking of to let you go?"

Una gave a faint little laugh.

"You had plenty to think of," she said. "Amethyst, have you quite said yes?"

"No," said Amethyst petulantly, "I haven't."

"Kiss me, hold me!" whispered Una, nestling up to her. "Then I can tell you. I told Sylvester Riddell about that day, I made him believe that he saw me. And there's not one of them as much in love with you as he is. That's the real thing. That's how I fainted, it was so hard."

"Oh, my dear child, let the past alone. What does it matter?" said Amethyst, though with a great throb at her heart. "That's all too late, all done with, that old time."

There was a minute's silence, then Una whispered—

"Amethyst, love me—I must tell—he came—Tony. Done with? Oh no, no,—it has been burning me up. But I cried out, and there came like a great light in my heart of a sudden, and for a moment I hated him like a fiend; and I escaped, and got to you. But oh—my life to come—my life to come! I can't be glad that He saved me! But He did!"

She pressed her face into Amethyst's neck, kissing her with burning lips.

"Christ came between," she said. "He took me from him."

The tone of intense conviction awed Amethyst all the more, that it was so quiet and sad. She was greatly shocked at the revelation of Una's trial, and reproached herself for her failure as guard or guide. Nothing however but tender soothing was possible now, and Una lay quite passive, till her throbbing pulses grew quieter, and at last she seemed to fall asleep.

Then Amethyst stole over to the open window, and looked across the square. The midsummer dawn was stealing over the sky, the sound of the dance music at the ball mingled with the twitter of the London sparrows. She could see the blaze of light in the houses opposite.

Her own fate pressed so upon her that she could scarcely think of Una's, save with a sort of half-incredulous surprise. If she herself was tempted—if this that she purposed was a sin against herself, no angel with a flaming sword would stop her way.

Was it indeed so? She had been stopped, with the words of self-committal upon her lips, and, in the moment's pause, had come upon her a revulsion of feeling almost as complete as that which Una

had described. Sir Richard's momentary want of tact in pressing her, the sudden recall of the past by Una's reference to it— Suddenly all her philosophy, her good sense, and her surface contentment fell away, and over her there came with a rush the thought, the feeling rather, of that other night,—of Lucian's boyish wooing, of his first kiss, of her own rapturous joy. Her strong nerves gave way, and sinking into a chair she wept silently, but with a passion of anguish, for the days that were gone for ever.

A tap at the door roused her. She hurried to open it, and there stood Tory, who, at her sign of silence, caught her hand and pulled her across the passage into her own room.

"Oh, Amethyst," she said, "I've got something dreadful to tell you. Charles came late to the ball—I saw Carrie looking out for him ever so often—and he talked and laughed loud as he came up-stairs, and I saw Tony and Sir Richard look at each other. But he went up to Carrie and asked her to dance, and they spun about oddly, and knocked up against the wall, and he would have thrown her down, if Tony, who was dancing with Kat, hadn't somehow caught her; and then Sir Richard took hold of him, and pulled him into the hall, and there was a sort of row and a noise. And oh, Amethyst, he was as tipsy as ever he could be, horrid brute! He might be a bad lot, without disgracing us in that way!"

And Tory stamped her foot, and for once cried hot tears of shame and anger.

"What happened then?" said Amethyst, pale and horror-struck.

"Sir Richard took him down-stairs, and he called out that he wouldn't be insulted, even if Grattan had lent him money."

"What?" interrupted Amethyst.

"Why, didn't you guess? I did. Indeed I heard my lady say so. How could Charles have shown up, else? It will be all right, I suppose, when he marries you."

"I never thought of such a thing," said Amethyst, utterly thrown off her balance.

"You're very innocent still, Amethyst," said Tory, recovering her usual manner, "you'll never be the same as if my lady had brought you up. Why, if Charles is the only person Sir Richard gave money to, to get us all up here—which I doubt—you may be quite sure he won't be the last."

Tory was not an impressionable person, but she never forgot Amethyst's face, as she turned and fled back into Una's room.

CHAPTER VII.

REPARATION.

WHEN Sylvester got back to his rooms and sat down to smoke, and to reflect in solitude, his feelings were in utter confusion.

He accepted Una's statement without a doubt, and, as was inevitable, it filled him with self-reproach, and the confession of his devotion had seemed but the poorest amends. But what good could devotion or reparation do her now? Then it struck him that this imaginary fact had been of infinitely more importance to Lucian than to himself, and that the first duty was to undeceive him.—To undeceive him when it was too late, for he had no idea where Lucian was; he could not telegraph vaguely to the Rocky Mountains, it was impossible to say when a letter would reach him, a letter that would tell him that he had been under a delusion when he flung Amethyst aside, and that would bring him back, to find her Lady Grattan. But she had not given Sir Richard her promise yet. If words had any meaning, Sylvester was sure that he had learned thus much. She was shrinking from the inevitable, her heart was not in the brilliant prospect before her. What then—what then? *He*

could not save her from it, she was caught in the toils. Perhaps she did not wish to be rescued? Sylvester was not incapable of comprehending the complexities of another nature, and, curiously enough, now that he had heard what might restore Amethyst to the ideal heights of her girlhood, he realized more clearly that she was no ideal, but a struggling human creature, that his Iris needed help as well as worship.

He did not spend much of the short summer night in sleep, and when he came down the next morning he found on his table a letter, in Lucian's writing, and with an English stamp, sent on from Oxbridge. He tore it open and read—

"ROYAL HOTEL, LIVERPOOL.
June 19th.

"DEAR SYL,

"This letter will surprise you. We never got to the Rockies, nor saw a bear. Just as we were well out of reach of the post and every other comfort, Jackson had a nasty fall and hurt his back. There was an end of everything for him. Rochdale joined another party, and went on, but I thought I might have another chance, so I stayed to look after him, and it was soon plain that he must come home. So here we are, and his brother came to meet us, and will see to him. It was a great sell for him. Now I'm looking at a yacht here, and think of going round the north of Scotland and perhaps on to Norway. Will you come? I suppose you are free now. My mother's abroad with the girls. How is the book?

"Yours ever,
"LUCIAN LEIGH."

Sylvester put down the letter, and felt that the

hand of Fate was upon him. He despatched a telegram in haste—

"Coming. Don't settle about the yacht till you have seen me."

Then he got himself ready, and took the first train to Liverpool.

He arrived there in the afternoon, and found Lucian just come back from seeing off his sick friend. He looked for once a little worn and tired, and owned to having had much fatigue and anxiety.

"And now," he said, "will you have something to eat, and then come and see the *Albatross?* She's a nice little cutter, and you look as if you'd written too much poetry, and wanted sea air."

"Not at all," said Sylvester, with a nervous laugh. "But I've something to tell you. Where can we find a quiet place?"

"Up-stairs, come along. We had to have a place where poor Jackson could lie down. What's the matter? All right at home?—What's up, then?"

Sylvester followed him up-stairs into the hotel sitting-room, and stood in the window, looking vaguely out at the street.

"Lucy," he said, getting quite cold with the effort, "I don't know if you care to hear, but last night I met the Miss Haredales at a ball. Una spoke to me, and, from what she said, I now feel absolutely certain that your mother and I made a mistake. We saw Una Haredale with Major Fowler, and, for the rest, there was some trumpery mystery as to borrowing money for Lady Haredale. Amethyst was bound to secrecy, hence all that seemed suspicious."

"Say that again," said Lucian, hoarsely. "It

was really the other girl you saw in the conservatory with Fowler?"

"Yes, no question of it."

"Then, what a thundering fool you were to mistake them!" cried Lucian violently.

"I was," said Sylvester, with dejection. "But I was not the only person, as you know. And I told you to trust her through thick and thin. I told you she was an angel of purity and innocence, no matter what I was fool enough to think I saw."

"It was so, or it wasn't," said Lucian.

"You saw her, *you* questioned her," said Sylvester. "She denied it. Una told the truth, then, and you did not believe either of them! I don't excuse myself. I'd give my right hand not to have done her—and you—such a wrong."

Lucian went over to the table and sat down. He trembled, and for some moments did not speak. At last he said—

"There's no one to blame but me. If I did not know her, who should? I thought I was right, and all the time I was wrong. There's only one thing to be done now, to go back and renew my offer at once and unconditionally, and to let every one know that I have done so."

"If your feelings remain the same——"

"My feelings? It's my duty."

"But," said Sylvester, breathlessly, "if—if you no longer loved her.—I don't think—"

"Love her? Why, you know I do. I always did," said Lucian.

"Then, Lucy," said Sylvester, "I'm afraid that there's a good deal of disappointment in store for you. If she is not engaged to Grattan, she is on the point of it, and there are scores of other men after her. She has had a great success, and all

London raves about her. I doubt her father's consent, and her pretensions are so great—"

"I can't help that," said Lucian. "It is my place to let every one about her know that I wish to marry her, and that, if she refuses me, it is her own doing. I'll go up through the night, and see her to-morrow."

He got up, and opening a travelling writing-case, took from it a little parcel, containing a photograph in a leather frame. He looked at it for a minute, then laid it before his friend.

It was the girl Amethyst, in a little country-made dress, with her hat in her hand, and her eyes looking happily out, in pleased expectation of the next thing that was coming, whatever it might be.

A deep blush coloured Sylvester's face. He felt for his own pocket-book, and, taking from it a photograph wrapped in silver paper, he opened it, and laid it beside Lucian's.

It was a half-length of the beautiful Miss Haredale in evening dress, the amethysts round her slender throat, her white neck and her long round arms uncovered, her face smiling and a little self-conscious; Amethyst in society. Lucian gave a slight start.

"Is she as handsome as that?" he said slowly. "It's not like her."

"She does not always look like it; but never like the other, now," said Sylvester with a sigh.

"How did you get it?"

"I bought it at a bazaar where she was selling. The Princesses sold theirs there—and actresses and other celebrities—I thought you might like to see it. That is why I have it here."

Lucian made no comment. He looked hard at the picture. It evidently made more impression

on him than anything that Sylvester could say. At last he took up the two photographs together.

"Thank you for bringing it to me," he said, and put it in his breast-pocket. Sylvester barely checked himself in his impulse to seize it, and his annoyance at Lucian's calm conviction that it must be meant for him, gave some sharpness to his tone, as he said—

"How do you propose to act, and to get to see her?"

Lucian did not answer for some minutes, then he said slowly—

"I did not consider. There are difficulties. Perhaps she would not receive me, and through her mother I will not act. Besides, if I was asked why I had come forward, it would not be easy to explain, as it would hardly do to mention Una. And I haven't got any clothes, so I can't go anywhere to meet her."

Lucian stated these various difficulties, with exactly the same tone of voice for all.

"Will you write?" said Sylvester.

"I don't think that that's quite the right thing. If I—insulted her, face to face—face to face I must ask her pardon. No, you know them. I suppose you can go and call, and ask her when I may come."

"I suppose I could," said poor Sylvester, with a pang. "Yes—I will."

"Thank you. But understand that it is my object to make known that I put myself at her disposal. It is not a case for concealing a refusal. Every one must know that I make the offer."

Sylvester gave a nervous laugh. Lucian's sense of his own importance to Amethyst seemed ludicrously out of proportion to the reality. He thought of Sir Richard Grattan, and Prince

Pontresina, and Lord Broadstairs, and of the various other men, who would have felt flattered by having it supposed that they had approached near enough to the beauty to propose to her.

"She has many offers," he said, rather dryly; "I think you must be prepared for such a possibility."

"Yes," said Lucian. "But it won't be worse than it has been. And if—"

He did not finish the sentence, but over the beautiful face which some people called statuesque, and others wooden, came, for once, a flush and a change, and Sylvester thought that Sir Richard might suffer in comparison.

"What's this Grattan like?" said Lucian, presently turning away.

"Oh—he's a commonplace beast," said the fine-spun Sylvester, "an 'oiled and curled Assyrian bull' sort of fellow. Sir Gorgius Midas—No, that's a libel. I don't know that he's a bad sort. He's all straight, and not bad-looking, and I shouldn't call him a cad exactly. He has as many millions as a man can want and two big estates, and a good moral character, and goes to church; and he's safe to be made a peer some day, and—it's blasphemy to couple him with—*her!*"

Lucian was not an observant person, and, while he was sadly considering, that though he was himself a moral character and a church-goer, and not bad-looking, he would never be made a peer, and had hardly as many thousands as Amethyst might want, he did not notice that Sylvester stopped short, then hurried on.

"That old scoundrel Broadstairs being out of the question, the Roman prince would be more in keeping. He *is* a gentleman."

"But I suppose he's a foreigner, and a Roman

Catholic. And a foreign prince doesn't go for much," said Lucian anxiously.

"Depends on the breed," said Sylvester. "But Grattan is the man."

"I would rather not talk about her any more," said Lucian, and, strange to say, he did not talk about her, but went with Sylvester to make a provisional arrangement with the owner of the *Albatross*, and then talked about his travels, and his sick friend, to whom he seemed to have become much attached. Then they went back to the hotel and had dinner, and came up to London by the night train, as Lucian had proposed.

Sylvester was tired with the two journeys, and with the strain on his mind, and went to bed for some hours. When he appeared again, Lucian, who had been to visit his tailor, and otherwise render himself fit for fashionable life, was sitting in the window reading 'Iris.'

"I've telegraphed to Ashfield. Some of my things are there," he said, "and I've got what I could. I should like to know if Iris was a real young woman. Because, if not, I don't see why he made such a fuss about her."

"Don't you see," said Sylvester, rather mistily, "she is the symbol of all that he felt to be the best — what he desired most. Perhaps at one time he desired a living Iris, but—but perhaps he had to content himself with knowing of her perfection."

"And did he?" said Lucian.

"I suppose every Amelot must answer that question for himself," said Sylvester.

"He never did, if there was a chance of getting the girl herself," said Lucian. "Syl, when are you going to the Haredales'?"

"Well, I must ask after Una, in common polite-

ness, and I'll get in if I can. It's twelve o'clock. I can go now. What will you do?"

"Wait." He paused a moment, then said, rather piteously, "I don't know why it should seem so hard, when yesterday I never thought I should see her again."

"Poor old boy, did you think about her yesterday, before I came?"

"I always thought about her, except when I was thinking of something else," said Lucian. "But now there's nothing else to think of."

"Well, I won't leave you long in suspense, if I can help it," said Syl, taking his hat, and going off. He was himself intensely eager to see Amethyst; must she not know, now, the confession that he had made to Una? She would know at what cost he brought Lucian's message. Why it should seem harder to give her back to his friend, than to see her marry a man whom he detested, he could not tell, except that every day, every hour, increased his restless misery. He would be loyal to Lucian, and then he felt that he did not know what would become of him. There was never much difficulty in getting into Lady Haredale's house, and he was at once admitted, and told that some of the ladies were at home.

As he came into the drawing-room he saw that, with better fortune than he could credit, Amethyst was there alone. She was sitting in a low chair with her hat on, and a parcel or two on the table near, as if she had just come in from doing some little errands. There was something dejected in her attitude, and, when she heard Sylvester's name, she blushed intensely, while he was very pale.

"My sister has been doing too much, she is over-tired, and will have to rest now," she said, in answer to his stammering inquiry for Una.

"Miss Haredale," said Sylvester, standing up before her, "I dare say your sister has told you of her kindness the other night. I do not dare even to apologize for the mistake which I made. My eyes were deceived, but my mind—never! It was of course my first duty to undeceive my friend, whom I so cruelly injured. By a strange chance, Lucian came back from America two days ago. He is in London, and he begs to be allowed to ask your pardon in person. It was not his fault."

There was a dead silence. Amethyst's deep blush slowly faded. Either she could not speak or did not know what to say. Then, after what seemed minutes, she spoke.

"That is all a very old story, Mr. Riddell. As you may have seen, we do not wish to look back on it in a tragical manner. If Mr. Leigh *wishes* to call here, I am sure my mother will be quite willing to receive him. Why not? As you say, he made a mistake. It was a natural one."

She spoke with a kind of hauteur, mingling with the smiling coolness of Lady Haredale's manner. Sylvester's heart sank within him. Then she did not care what either of them thought of her.

"You would be at home—when?" he stammered.

"Let me see. This afternoon we go to a *matinée*. We expect a few friends to-night, we shall be at home after dinner. Will you come then—and Mr. Leigh, if he wishes."

Sylvester murmured thanks and acceptance, and having gained his point went away miserable.

When he got back, he did his best to make Lucian as unhappy as himself; so that it was perhaps as well that the latter went off by the next train to Cleverley to fetch the dress-clothes, which he had left behind him there.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEAD PAST.

ON the morning after Miss Grattan's great ball Miss Annabel Haredale sat alone, in the pretty sitting-room assigned to herself and Miss Carisbrooke. She was very unhappy, almost more unhappy than when, more than two years ago, she had made up her mind to give Amethyst back to her parents—and she was not now so entirely clear in conscience. She had, when something like necessity impelled her, fallen back into a way of looking at things, which she had long cast aside. For many years in her quiet untempted life, she had been in the habit of thinking whether things were right, and now she had returned to early customs of thinking whether they were expedient. As she sat reflecting on the scenes of the night before, there was a tap at the door, and Amethyst came in. Miss Haredale thought that she had come to announce her engagement, and, with a freak of memory, her thoughts flew back to the morning when the girl had rushed in upon her, full of delight to tell her that she had passed an examination!

If Amethyst had good news to tell now, she did not seem much exhilarated by it.

"Aunt Anna," she said, "there are one or two things I want to ask you about, and I hope you will tell me nothing but the truth about them."

"Of course, my dear. I am sure you know that I shall."

"I think you will," said Amethyst, "though I don't see how any one can do them, and yet tell the truth about them. Do you mean to let Carrie marry Charles? You have intended it, I know."

"Why, Amethyst," said Miss Haredale, "there's no one but Charles to keep up the family name. He must marry a girl with money, and, though Carrie wants style, he might do worse. And he is making great efforts to reform—of course last night was a sad slip. But I do think he is really anxious to settle. Imagine what it would be, if he couldn't show when he comes to the title."

"I want to know how he has been enabled to show now," said Amethyst, with icy coldness. And then, after a pause—"Did Sir Richard Grattan lend him the money?"

"Well, yes—he did, my dear. He did a great deal for him. The money was nothing to him, you know, and your father was really gratified."

"And what else has he done for us?" pursued Amethyst.

"Well—he bought the farms near Haredale. Of course, Amethyst, even with the help of Carrie's guardians, your father couldn't have taken this house, unless he had found a good purchaser. Sir Richard did it in the most delicate way—"

"But if Sir Richard wanted to marry me, I should have thought giving me a season in town did not improve his chances."

"Why, Amethyst—anyhow you would have gone out with Lady Molyneux. And now, he has had every opportunity. And he improves so *much* on acquaintance. When you make him happy, he will never think of the trifling obligation. Of course, I suppose the matter is now settled; but he was very anxious that you should feel perfectly free."

"And all this has been done for the honour of the family. I've heard my lady say, that if people had a shady sort of record, it was much better to own it and take the consequences. I think I agree with her. One other thing. Did Mr. Carisbrooke make this arrangement about Carrie and Charles?"

"Well, no—but he expressed a great desire that she should join your party. And I don't know why you speak like this, Amethyst, I never knew you take such a tone before."

"I never heard you take such a tone in Silverfold, Aunt Annabel."

"Ah, my dear child, Silverfold days were very happy ones. But you are young, and you can't realize what family ruin is. You often think things bad for the girls, but they might be far worse. Last spring it was very nearly a case of going to live on the continent—cheap. Now just think of that with you four girls. What would there be for either of your parents but the gaming table, my dear child? And nothing left of mine for you to fall back upon. And the Haredales are not long-lived; if your father died, what *would* become of you all? Now, when you are well married—Amethyst, of course there's a great deal I don't like, but I really do think that there's nothing, not absolutely criminal, that it's not a woman's duty to do to save her family from such a

dreadful fate. Oh, my dear, you can't remember your uncles Percy and Tom, but never shall I forget the details that came out at their deaths, nor seeing poor Percy once abroad. My dear, when one is young and hard, one may think it serves one's brother right, but one's nephew—oh no, my dear. And Charles would be kind to a woman who liked him."

"And it was for the good of the family that my half-sister was made to marry a man she hated? I don't think it answered in that case."

"Poor Blanche had no force of character. She was not like any of you. Besides, my dear child, I am sure you do like Sir Richard. I do think your remarkable attractions are quite providential."

"Don't you think you had better have let me be a St. Etheldred's teacher?" said Amethyst, clasping her hands behind her head, and looking full at her aunt. Amethyst scarcely ever gave the rein to her tongue, and poor Miss Haredale hardly knew what to make of it.

"No, my dear," she said, puzzled, "I can't think that."

Amethyst looked at her with a smile like Tory's. Then she laughed a little, and said—

"Never mind, Auntie; you see, after all, it's you that I feel at home with, and so I behave ill. It's such a comfort. I only wanted to know just how the land lay." And with a kind kiss, she went away, none the happier for her knowledge.

She had not known before how near the other side of the line was, how little lay between her family and an amount of "difficulty" that would make their position untenable. Perhaps she was young and hard; but it was hardly likely she could care for Charles himself, and she distrusted

him so entirely that she did not believe that the family name would ever get safe out of his hands.

As she came into the drawing-room, to her intense surprise, there the culprit sat. He never seemed at home nor in place among all the knick-knacks and pretty things, and now he looked sick, shy, and miserable. Charles had none of the nonchalance of his half-sisters, and, truth to tell, he was afraid of them.

"Look here, Amethyst," he said, awkwardly. "It was deuced unlucky last night, I know. Do tell Grattan I apologize, and all that's proper. Bad wine at the club, that was all—brandied sherry. Say the kind thing, there's a good girl."

"I did not see what passed, and I shall say nothing about it," said Amethyst, coldly.

"You see—I don't want Grattan to cut up rough, and though, of course, he's put his hand in his pocket—I've helped him to the connection. He's not a bad sort, but of course he ain't a man of family. Put him up to the idea, that the correct thing is to take no notice of anything of that sort."

"I dare say Sir Richard Grattan can judge of what's correct," said Amethyst.

"Then too," said Charles, shifting a little in his chair, "there's another thing.—I'd tackle Grattan; but girls hang by each other. You might prevent little Carrie from thinking me a reprobate."

"How?" said Amethyst.

"Well—tell her it's nothing uncommon. Might happen to any gentleman. 'As drunk as a lord' is a proverb, you know. I shan't make a bad husband—assure you I shan't."

Amethyst stood by the table, perfectly silent. She felt that, if she spoke, her tongue would sting worse than ever Tory's could.

"But of course," said Charles, more freely, and getting a little angry, "if you tell her that when a fellow's once down he's always down, she'll give me the sack. And that's what all you women do think, specially the religious ones. You think yourselves so much better than other people!"

"No, Charles, we don't," said another voice; and Una, who had come into the room while he was speaking, came forward, and stood near him, her slight swaying figure leaning against the table, and her large melancholy eyes fixed on his face. "Indeed we don't think that. We know—religion—will help every one."

"Hallo!" said Charles, "little Una talking goody! What? Do you think I shall turn pious?"

"I think," said Una, "that God will help you just as much as He helps me. And, indeed, we don't despise you."

"Oh, Una!" said Charles, in an odd, simple voice, "He'll punish me. Why, I never said my prayers since I went to school. But I should go to church, if my wife wanted me to, and I'd rather she was strict. You can tell little Carrie so, Una. And look here—a man don't mean anything, you know, if a word slips out ladies aren't accustomed to, specially after dinner. Tell her so—there's a good girl. You mean to say a kind thing."

What Una might have answered was interrupted by the entrance of Lord Haredale, who called his son away, rather curtly, and Amethyst broke out—

"Una! How can you. How can any one like *that* repent? Why, I don't believe that he has left himself all his senses!"

"I am so sorry for him," said Una.

"I cannot be, when I think of his wanting a good girl to marry him!"

"But, Amethyst, he might be changed. You believe that?"

"Well, yes—in a way, of course, I believe it. But people after all are what they have made themselves. He can't repent, so as to be much good, in this world, at any rate."

Amethyst spoke harshly and recklessly. There was something in Charles's half-ruffianly, half-foolish manner, that revolted her past any sense of pity for him, and she was in no mood for toleration. She had no great inward impulse to set against the force of circumstances, and to be driven by necessity is a very different thing from being urged forward by a force within.

There was nothing for it but to marry Sir Richard Grattan, she had scarcely a choice left. She believed that she should always be mistress enough of herself to play her part with success; and interests, such as her friendship with Mr. Carisbrooke, who happily did not want to marry her, might keep her spirit alive. Yes, she was acting rightly, and yet she felt it utterly impossible to ask for the help of which Una had spoken.

Still in this humour on the next morning, while she had so far managed to avoid the actual, final "Yes" to Sir Richard's suit, she heard Sylvester's announcement and request, which she answered with a certain sense of defiance both of herself and of him.

But, when he was gone, she knew that she was shaken almost to pieces by her interview with him, and she could hardly string herself up to go, as arranged, with her aunt and Carrie, to a fashionably patronized *matinée* in which a *débutante*, in

whose performance Mr. Carisbrooke was interested, was to play *Juliet.*

Amethyst was too high-strung a creature not to be susceptible to dramatic excitement; she was no critic of acting, and was not perhaps so familiar with the play, that it did not come upon her with some freshness. Its influence seized her like a sort of madness, possessing and changing her. Whether the spirit breathed airs from heaven or blasts from hell, it was absolute. Given a Romeo, Juliet's was the only course—the charnel-house rather than the County. This was a force to which her own nature answered, which Mr. Carisbrooke had already done something to awaken. Here was a great and mighty impulse, which would make life worth living, or death worth dying. She did not cry, or melt with pity over the woes of Juliet, she felt the force of such passion in herself, she saw the power of such self-devotion. Her real self seemed to flash into life, as she recalled her own brief love-story, her own young love. And to-night she was to see her old lover again. Not only prudence, expediency, worldly wisdom, would go down before the flood, but right and wrong, if there was any right but allowing such a force of nature to have its way.

She went home, and put on her simplest white dress, and clasped the amethysts round her neck, and put the purple stars in her hair, just as she had worn them at Cleverley more than two years ago.

When she went in to Una, who was glad enough to make her health an excuse for not meeting the two young men, the girl looked at her half frightened.

"Amethyst," she said, "you never looked so lovely in your life."

So thought Sylvester Riddell, as he came into the drawing-room among the other guests of the evening, with Lucian Leigh by his side. He was pale and nervous, and felt intensely the awkwardness of the situation as they walked up to Lady Haredale. Lucian's extreme straightforwardness saved him from the difficulty.

"Lady Haredale," he said very low, "I have to beg your pardon."

"What for, Mr. Leigh? Oh, I haven't at all a good memory, but all our Cleverley friends are welcome, as I told my daughter when she happened to mention that you were coming. Mrs. Leigh is not in town?"

She smiled with cheerful sweetness, but Lucian felt as if she had dashed a cup of cold water in his face.

He looked handsome and striking, with his tall slight figure, and his delicate, regular face bronzed with travel, and marked by an intense gravity of expression.

"Oh, my stars," whispered Tory to Kattern, "he's a deal more thorough-bred than Sir Richard!" While Miss Haredale sighed over the wild insanity that had allowed him to appear at this juncture.

Amethyst was standing under a chandelier; she had the faculty of being able to stand perfectly still. Several people were round her, among them Sir Richard, and Oliver Carisbrooke. A lady congratulated Sir Richard on his delightful ball.

"It was not a success for me," he said carelessly, "but my sister is thinking of a big water-party, if this fine weather continues. That, I hope, will go off better."

Lucian began to cross the room.

"Where shall you go?" said the lady.

Lucian was close at hand.

"No," said Oliver Carisbrooke, in a low full voice, which only Amethyst heard. "No, it will not be."

Lucian bowed, and Amethyst held out her hand to him.

"Thank you for allowing me to come," he said. He did not try to look unconscious. He meant every one to see that he came with an object. Sylvester, at once admiring and suffering, owned that he could not have done it half so well.

"You have come back suddenly to England," said Amethyst.

"Yes, my friend had an accident."

"That was very unfortunate for you?"

"No, I don't think so."

"But weren't you going to the Rocky Mountains? Haven't you brought back any bears?" said Amethyst.

She was of course obliged to say something, and her manner grew easier as the light slowly faded out of her face.

Here Mr. Carisbrooke claimed Lucian's acquaintance, and a few courtesies passed. Sylvester wondered what next. Even Lucian could hardly go down on his knees under the chandelier. He spoke a few needful words, but Sylvester, rather to his surprise, saw that he had turned conspicuously pale. He barely waited till the bystanders were not absolutely looking and listening, then said abruptly—

"May I speak to you?"

She hesitated a moment, and then skilfully moved a little away into the window, with a few light words about the lovely night which gave him a chance to follow, while Sylvester dashed at Sir Richard, and told him that he considered the leader of his political party a drag on the wheels

of progress, and likely at the same time to plunge the country into anarchy.

Lucian and Amethyst stood in the open window. The trees in the square were motionless as pictures in the utter stillness of a London summer night, the flowers on the balcony were colourless in a flood of moonlight. There was a great silence, in which the roar of the traffic was but as the roar of the sea.

"Amethyst," said Lucian, "can you forgive me? I was wrong."

"Oh yes," said Amethyst, "I have long known that you could not help it."

"Of course," he said, "I have always loved you exactly the same. Nothing could change that, I want you to understand at once that I am just the same. Will you go back?"

"But I am not at all the same," said Amethyst. "I can't say that I have learned nothing, and forgotten nothing."

"Have you forgotten that time?"

"No," said Amethyst, with passion in her voice.

"Then you can't have forgotten me? Are you too angry?"

"No, no."

"Two years wouldn't seem like two minutes, if we come together."

"Two minutes—two ages! Lucian, I might say fifty things and put you off, and leave it doubtful. But I'll only say one, and I surely know it. I don't love you now."

"You love some other man?"

"No, I don't, but—" with a sudden outburst, "you killed my love for you, dead, and it won't come to life again. It's no good—no good—for I shall never have it again—never!"

"I—surely you cannot tell. I will wait—let me come again. I had to let you know I was yours—but on your side—when I knew you had been true to me, and that I wronged you—that you really loved me, I never thought it possible your love could change."

"Well, I have changed," said Amethyst. "It is all gone by, I can't go back. I had to turn into a different person, and I can't put back the clock. I shouldn't fall in love with you, if I met you now. But I wish I had died when I did love you."

She darted back into the shelter of the lights and the crowd, and soon she saw Lucian and his friend bow to her mother and go. Sir Richard Grattan came up to her to say good-night.

"May I come to-morrow?" he said, with meaning.

Amethyst looked full at him, as if she were then and there appraising him, and making up her mind. Then, very slowly and distinctly, she said—

"*Yes.*"

No! Lucian was not her Romeo, and she was not to find her deliverance in the flood-tide of passion. A girl with weaker brain, or of less concentrated feeling, might have doubted and wondered, and tried to conjure up the old magic, but Amethyst was too clever and too intense for self-deception.

Lucian was nothing to her but a handsome boy, and the love of her girlhood was gone for ever. She had left it behind her.

CHAPTER IX.

TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL.

UNA lay awake through the early part of the hot summer night, with her mind full of the crisis in Amethyst's fate.

She was sad and anxious; all the sweetness of her life was owing to Amethyst's tenderness, and how long would the loving sister be left beside her?

She could not guess at all what choice Amethyst would be impelled to make, what effect the sight of Lucian would have upon her. She had hardly seemed to heed the discovery that Sylvester Riddell was her lover too. Had she made up her mind to marry Sir Richard Grattan at all costs? Was not Oliver Carisbrooke more to her than she knew? Una believed that her own life had been shipwrecked for ever. She longed with all her heart to see Amethyst steer clear of the treacherous rocks in her way.

She lay awake in the sultry air, listening till the sound of the expected step on the stairs made her heart throb till she was faint.

The step was slow and lingering—would it pass

by? No, the door was softly opened, and Amethyst came in. She stood at the foot of the bed, in the flood of summer moonlight, so that her face looked as white as her gown, and her amethysts glittered with a colourless gleam. She looked at Una with cold heavy eyes, and her voice was dull and lifeless.

"Are you having a bad night, dear?" she said.

"Yes—never mind. What has happened to you?"

"Nothing," said Amethyst.

"Didn't he come after all?"

"Oh yes! But I can't tell why I used to think him so interesting. He's a very handsome boy, but I can't fall in love now with a straight nose and good intentions. If I lived fifty years with him, he would never know what I was thinking of."

She laughed as she spoke, a short bitter little laugh. "He has done his best—done his duty by me. But he can't put the clock back."

"I said that you were never really in love with him!" said Una, after a moment's startled silence.

"I was, with every thought and feeling and part of me! But I've forgotten him. I'm not made of the stuff to be constant and faithful—as he has been. He was a fool not to know I was a good girl then! I believe I'm a very bad one now!"

"You looked so happy, when you thought he was coming."

"Yes, I thought if the sight of him brought it all back, I could even forgive him—and his mother—and mine! I was as much a fool then as he was, not to force him to believe in me. But if I had, and had found out by this time that he was stupid!"

"He must have loved you very much."

"He loved his duty or his honour, or whatever it

was, better than he loved me," said Amethyst. "He has done his duty by me now, and satisfied his sense of honour. But what am I talking about? What is the use of feelings? And what is the use of keeping you awake and making you ill? Lie down, my sweet, I shall be in my senses to-morrow, and then you shall hear some news."

"Oh, Amethyst, don't do it!" cried Una. "Whether you have forgotten Lucian or not, if you can't care for any one again——"

"Oh, but I guess I could," said Amethyst, recklessly. "There's the very thing—there's the rub."

"But not Sir Richard?"

"As to that," said Amethyst, "in all honour I am bound to him. I have been meaning it. I *can* do it. And we are all bound to him. I should as good as jilt him if I threw him over now. But—if Lucian had brought my heart back to me—I would have broken through it all! Though I would have begged Sir Richard's pardon on my knees. But there's nothing strong enough in me to do it now."

"Oh, my darling," cried Una, starting up and clinging to her, "there can be! I told you how it was with me—me—that am so weak and so bad. It is quite true. I don't understand it—at other times—I'm just my foolish self. But just now and then—as that poem you used to be fond of says—'My strength is as the strength of ten.' But it's not because my heart is pure—for it's not, it's not—but because He is stronger than I am! The 'Spirit of the Lord came upon me.' I know what that means, Amethyst, though He does go quite away, quite—quite!"

Amethyst was somewhat awe-struck.

"But He doesn't come to me, Una," she said in

a subdued voice, "and I can't even ask Him. Because whatever I do can't be really right, I've tied the knots too tight."

"But I suppose God thinks that one way would be more right than another," said Una.

Childish as was the form of speech, it struck an answering chord in Amethyst's soul; but Una's tone was so faint with weariness that she refused to go on talking, made her lie back on the pillows, and left her as soon as possible, to think the problem out for herself.

"'My dismal scene I needs must act alone,'" she thought, as she slowly undressed herself, and lay down in bed.

She lay on her back, with her hands clasped over the top of her head, and watched the moonlight on the opposite wall. She had her fate in life to decide. At twenty years old, "half-grown as yet, a child and vain," she had so strong a principle of growth within her, that her true self had hardly yet begun to be. She *had* decided. She had made up her mind, long ago, that she would marry Sir Richard Grattan. As his wife she would belong to good and honourable people; all her tastes and faculties would have full scope; a great career would be before herself, and she could always be a stand-by to her sisters. She was desirous of doing right, though she could not realize Una's experience otherwise than as an impression on the girl's mind. But it had not ceased to be the best thing for herself to marry Sir Richard, because she had discovered that a great impulse—a great passion, would induce her to break free from him. For no great impulse was there.

She did pray for help, though with a cold and wavering spirit, and she made up her mind to her course of action. She went down-stairs in the

morning, in the full conviction that she would accept Sir Richard before the day was out.

Breakfast was an irregular meal, and no one was there but Tory, who attended an early French class, and was sitting with her hat on.

"Amethyst," she said, "I believe there's something up. Father came in last night after you went up-stairs, and he and my lady talked for hours in the dressing-room. She actually cried."

"Did she?" said Amethyst, startled.

"Yes. Whichever of them you mean to say 'yes' to, you had better get it done with a clear conscience before you know of anything to stop you."

"But what do you think——?"

"I think we've come to smash. But if it's Sir Richard, he must have known we soon should."

Before Amethyst could reply, a message came to say that her ladyship wanted to speak to Miss Haredale. She went up-stairs with a beating heart, and found her mother, to her surprise, up and dressed, with the marks of tears on her face.

"Amethyst," she said, "I believe the game is up. Your engagement must be announced to-day, and we must leave town at once. Is Sir Richard coming this morning? Don't let there be another hour's delay."

"What has happened?" stammered Amethyst.

"Now don't be frightened," said Lady Haredale, "and to be shocked is no use. You know that your father raised money on the Haredale farms, with Charles's consent. Sir Richard bought them. Some of it we were to spend in coming to London —on your account, Amethyst. With the rest he was to pay off a mortgage which, through various changes, had come into the hands of Blanche's husband, Sir Edward Clyste. Well, he didn't do it, but risked the money on a horse at Epsom,

and lost it. Now that's not all, it's a very ugly story, and I'm sorry to have to tell you. It seems my lord's affairs at Epsom were mixed up with *the other man's*,—you know."

"What other man, mother?"

"Why, Captain Vincent—the man Blanche was so imprudent about. He behaved scandalously, and of course we were supposed to cut him. But it's always forgive and forget with my lord, and —if any one would give him any advantage in a racing matter, his character wouldn't count for much. Well, the connection was kept a secret, but it's come out apparently in that set, and Sir Edward—who is on the turf too—when he finds that the money, which really was pledged to him, has been lost in connection with Vincent, isn't likely to have much mercy. Moreover, Vincent, it seems, has done something which steps over the line which racing men think fair and square. Myself, I don't see much difference between what they will do and what they won't, but men feel differently. So he's to be sent to Coventry, and though my lord knew nothing about that, mixing up his money matters with Vincent's, under the circumstances, isn't thought the thing. And things will be made very uncomfortable for us. Now, we must get Sir Richard to advance the money to pay off the mortgage, and no doubt he will, it's only £6000, but even that won't set everything straight again."

Lady Haredale spoke with a certain hard, practical cynicism which was the skeleton on which her sweet, shallow gaiety was grown, and Amethyst answered in the same tone.

"No. Nothing can alter the fact that my father has done a dishonourable thing."

"Well—it's come to be dishonourable—doubtful,

certainly; but I don't suppose it looked so, step by step. He is very miserable, my poor old lord, I assure you. You know he has hardly ever come near us, or gone about with us. But what with this, and what with the drawback of Charles, and that odious Mrs. St. George, who hates me, and contrives to make every one think there was something queer about the debts which were paid when I took your amethysts, poor child! (not that there was anything but a few harmless fibs)—what with all this, though I've as much pluck as most women, and though people will swallow a great deal to have you at their parties, I really don't think I can fight it out any longer."

"But when Sir Richard Grattan knows all this, will he still choose to connect himself with my father—and Charles—and—the rest of us?"

"Why, Amethyst," said Lady Haredale, "that's what you have got to secure. You know we can't tell him any lies, because other men will tell him the truth. But he's very much infatuated with you, stiff as you have always been. Encourage him, be kind and loving to him, and he won't break your heart or give you up."

Amethyst leant back in her chair with her hands lying on her lap. She was pale and very still, and when she spoke, her voice had a clear, satirical ring, as if she had been saying something clever in society. But, in truth, she was at the white heat of passion, so that she defied every instinct of natural reverence and shame. There is a sort of truth-speaking, of calling things by their right names, that means the entire rebellion of the soul.

"I don't see much difference between any of us," she said. "My father condones his daughter's disgrace for the sake of a money advantage, and

continues under an obligation to his son-in-law who has been wronged; you tell harmless fibs, and, among other things, you think it a trifle that a man like Major Fowler should have destroyed all Una's peace and freshness; Charles does things which I am never supposed to hear of, and besides, gets drunk in society. My half-sister married one man when she loved another, and I suppose never troubled to avoid him afterwards. I am going to marry a man for whom I don't care a straw, because he has money and can help my family, and I am to take advantage of having the sort of beauty which makes fools of men, to get him to take a burden on his shoulders of which he's sure to repent in future. Which is the worst of us? Even Aunt Anna will let that poor girl marry Charles 'for the honour of the family.'"

"Amethyst," exclaimed Lady Haredale, really shocked, "you never heard me say anything of that sort."

"No—you *do* it."

"That is quite a different thing. Pray never let your sisters hear you talk in such a manner. And as for Blanche, she never saw Captain Vincent before she was married. I don't know who her old love was, she would never tell us. But she was a girl who couldn't do without something of the kind going on. If you knew how hard it has been to get on at all, you would not make matters worse by speaking to me in that way."

Amethyst was silent. She had burnt her ships, and outraged all her natural instincts, and she felt impenitent and strong.

"A gentleman, asking for Miss Haredale," said a servant at the door.

"Sir Richard, I suppose," said Amethyst, stand-

ing up. "Well, mother, I'm going down-stairs to accept him—if he asks me. But I'll take care he knows the worst of my family, and I shall tell him that I don't yet know the worst of myself."

She went down-stairs, with the evil power still in her heart. The inward force had come to her, not in love, but in hate. There are inspirations from the land of darkness, and these too can make strong. They find their opportunity in self-despair.

"Nothing and no one will interfere to save *me*," she thought.

She opened the drawing-room door, and found herself face to face, not with Sir Richard Grattan, but with Sylvester Riddell.

CHAPTER X.

ACCORDING TO HIS LIGHT.

AMETHYST'S two lovers went out from her presence into the gaslight and the moonlight, and walked through the still busy streets of the West End, hardly exchanging a word with each other.

Neither of them had eaten much that day, and Sylvester took Lucian to his club and ordered supper, but he looked white and wretched, and shook his head when his friend pressed him to eat and drink. He hated the public place, the sense of homelessness, he wanted to hide himself like an unhappy dog. At last he said,

"I can do nothing to make up for the past."

"Well, two years is a long time," said Sylvester, whose own feelings were too exacting just then to leave space for much sympathy with Lucian.

"Is it? I've done a great many things since we parted; but I've never felt anything but—wanting her. She seems a thousand times more glorious than ever to me, and I am nothing to her—now."

"But you didn't think, before you saw her again, that, after all that passed, she had continued to care for you?" said Syl, curiously.

"I did not know *then*, if she ever had truly cared for me," said Lucian. "I supposed that she had not, that it had all been a delusion. What else could I think? Even then, I did not forget her. But when I found, when she herself says now, that in that old time, she was real and true—I don't see how any one can change a true love once given. It's a thing I can't conceive possible. It would have seemed a fresh wrong to her to fear it."

"Did it never occur to you," said Sylvester impatiently, "that she was not half grown up, two years ago, and that now she may see that you are not the kind of person to suit her?"

"I never could have out-grown her," said Lucian.

"And did you never think that she has never forgiven us—you—for misjudging her?"

"That is a different thing. That is not how it is," said Lucian, positively; then, standing up, "I want to get back to your rooms, Syl. I can't stand anything more. I'll go to bed, I feel done for."

There was something pathetic in the faithfulness that could not imagine the possibility of change in the love that had once been proved worthy; but naturally Lucian's self-confidence struck Sylvester forcibly, and as they walked away together once more, he suddenly lost the remains of his patience, and broke out—

"Can't you see that a creature like that has a thousand needs and possibilities that have developed in her since she belonged to you? It may be for good, or it may be for evil, but she cannot go back. Did it never strike you *then* that you had got hold of a being all force and fire, a splendid goddess, altogether out of your ken?"

"No," said Lucian, "I meant to take care of her, and I hoped we should go on, and lead the right sort of lives together."

"Well, we are each shut up in the bounds of our own nature," said Sylvester, shortly.

"I think," said Lucian, after a pause, "that you are trying to make me see that I never was good enough for her."

"Who could be?"

"If it has been all my fault," said Lucian, in a shaken voice, "it is a hard thing to know. For—it is not all right with her now. Good-night, Syl—" for by this time they had reached the lodgings—"I'm going to bed. You think I'm not enough of a fellow for her, but she has all there is of me, and it's no good to her."

He hurried away, and shut himself into his room. His words hardly did him justice; for his thoughts were crude and one-sided; but the entire trust in the word once given, the love that had survived even the loss of faith, were feelings of heroic size.

Lucian really had few faults, and such as he had, he guarded against with dutiful, if somewhat formal, technical conscientiousness. Defects of nature, as distinct from acts of sin, he did not recognize.

When he found that he had been led to misjudge Amethyst, his conscience, as well as his heart, was shocked, he felt that he ought not to have been deceived, and, whether he could understand it or no, he knew that she was lost to him for ever. She was not for him. He saw too that she *was* changed. She was not what he had expected to find her. He was bewildered by her, and he had to live without her.

Lucian's religion was as simple as his view of life. Under its dictates, he had abstained from the ordinary sins of school and college life, and had framed his view of what was becoming to a young man of property. Like the young ruler, he kept the Commandments. He distinctly believed that his life was ordered for him, and, in this fresh

agony, which had brought a certainty, which, while the separation from Amethyst had been his *own* doing, he had never really felt, he recognized that he must not throw it away.

The right thing to do, soon, was to go and live at Toppings by himself, or with his mother and sisters. There would never be any one else now. He would go for his three months' cruise in the *Albatross*, and get over the worst of his trouble. He thought that he would rather be alone, at first, than with Sylvester. Somehow, his old companion jarred upon him. Perhaps friend, as well as love, had out-grown him.

Meanwhile, Sylvester had been haunted by the echo of one of Lucian's sentences, "All is not right with her now." No, indeed, and the lover of her girlhood was powerless to help. Could his own love, so much more full, as it seemed to him, of comprehending in sight, do nothing? He would have been wretched if she had turned back to Lucian's love. That could not have sufficed her; but it was far worse that she should choose the lower part, defy and ignore all the imperious demands of her fine spirit. And he must stand by and see it.—He who had watched her course, and read her needs and her dangers, from the very first day that, behind the beauty that had captivated his senses, he had seen the aspiring soul look out from her eyes.

Through the short hours of darkness Sylvester lay in helpless rage and despair; but suddenly, when the light of the summer dawn came through his open window, and the London sparrows began to twitter, and the life of London to wake up with the roll of the market waggons and the tread of the earliest passing feet, he started up, inspired with a sudden purpose.

"I will not stand by, and see it. What matter what she may think of me or of my doings? I have no hope of her. She is not for me. But my soul shall tell her soul the truth. She, her true self, shall not fight the battle alone, with every one around her on the side of the world, the flesh, and the devil."

Sylvester Riddell was not a person who led an ardent or strenuous life. His professional duties at the University were not very arduous, his literary work was of a somewhat dilettante nature, his mind was full of conflicting theories.

But though he wrote verse that was not quite poetry, though he was inconsistent, and harmlessly self-indulgent, he had moments of inspiration, when the "demon" that speaks to prophet and poet would speak to him. Such a moment came now. A purpose, impossible conventionally, but which, nevertheless, he would carry out, had come to him, and he called down all power in earth and heaven, every force which he believed to make for righteousness, to fight on his side and to help him. Never had such real prayer gone forth from his soul, as now when he determined to reinforce with every particle of spiritual strength within him, the wavering spirit of the woman he loved. He felt ashamed of his irritation against Lucian, who, after all, had served Amethyst as well as he knew how, though he did not wish him to guess either his feelings or his purpose, thinking, rather unjustly, that Lucian would not be able to understand him, and would suppose that he meant to make Amethyst an offer.

Lucian was very quiet, and seemed to find breakfast a difficulty. After a silence he said—

"There's one thing, Syl, I think should be done, and it would be best for you to do it. Will you write to my mother, and undeceive her? She will believe you. It is all gone by, but I cannot

have one shadow left upon her which can be removed."

"Yes, I will," said Sylvester. "What shall you do now yourself?"

"I think I shall close with the man who owns the *Albatross*—for three months only. Will you come?"

"I hardly know. I ought to go to Cleverley first. Perhaps I might join you later."

"I've got a note from Jackson," said Lucian; "he wants me to run down and see him first. He misses me—I got to know his ways."

He did not get very steadily to the end of the sentence, he was touched at finding himself satisfactory to some one.

"Could he go with you?" said Sylvester.

"Oh no. He ought to be perfetly quiet. But I shall ask him to come to Toppings in the autumn. I must make a beginning there some time. I'll do it then."

"Well, Lucy, I dare say that's quite right."

"I shall go off this morning," said Lucian. "Jackson's father lives near Chester. Then on to Liverpool. I'll leave word there about letters. Tell me if—when—when anything happens. I'm very much obliged to you for having given me the chance of contradicting my former conduct. I think, perhaps, in time to come, she may like to remember that I did it. And tell your father, please, that I renewed my offer, and that she refused me. I can't think of anything else that I can do or say."

"It has been hard lines on you, my dear old boy."

"Yes. But that's no matter, if I have in any way repaired the injustice. I've seen her; I suppose I never shall again. She did say a hard thing. But—well, Syl, good-bye, I'll go and look after a train

to suit me. Thank you. I'm glad it's all happened. Good-bye. When your time comes, I hope you'll have better luck."

He smiled ruefully enough, and held out his hand. Sylvester took it.

"Say one thing more, Lucy," he said; "wish me as single a purpose as your own."

Lucian looked puzzled. Sylvester's lips were set and pale, and his eyes very bright.

"I'll wish you anything I can," he said, and went off to collect his belongings.

He was longer about it than Sylvester had expected; the hansom he had ordered waited, before he came in again ready to start.

He put something down on the table.

"I don't think you brought that photograph to Liverpool for me, Syl," he said, and was gone before a word could be spoken.

CHAPTER XI.

A FAITHFUL SERVANT.

WHEN Amethyst found herself, with a shock of surprise, in Sylvester's presence, her first thought was that he had come to plead the cause of Lucian Leigh, and there was a certain distance in her tone as she said—

"Mr. Riddell!"

"Miss Haredale," said Sylvester, standing up before her, "I have come to beg you not to marry Sir Richard Grattan. Forgive me—forgive me. I am so beyond defence on any ground but one, that no beating about the bush will soften my actions. I love you, therefore I understand you. Your heart is not in this marriage. If you give away your freedom, all the best part of you will die. I am pleading for no one, not for myself nor for Lucian. Oh, don't deny your heart—your soul—don't do this thing."

His voice was full of such strong vibration, though he spoke low, his eyes so full of passionate purpose, the astonishment at his words was so great, that Amethyst stood looking at him for a moment, with wide-open eyes and parted lips. He took courage and went on—

"I know it would be all well enough for some women. I know how often it is done. But it is not right for you—not for you. That which you defy—you don't think it is your conscience—but it is—it is—it is the Voice of God within you. It is the highest claim that He can make on you."

Sylvester came close to her and grasped her hands. In her wide startled eyes, he seemed to read what he must say. Not one thought of himself marred the intensity of his appeal, and she made no attempt to fence with him, forgot how easily, with one conventional word, she could have put him aside. He seized upon her and dominated her, as no one else had ever done.

"I did not think God ever spoke to me," she said.

"Oh yes, He does," answered Sylvester. "I have seen your eyes listen."

"But," said Amethyst, "I don't think you can know. My romance is over. I—till a few days back—I was quite content to marry him. He is quite good. And I am almost bound. It would do such dreadful harm to draw back. It would be wrong just to follow a feeling—a fear—"

"No, no!" cried Sylvester. "Ten thousand times—no! If so, every martyr, every patriot, who followed his highest instincts, regardless of old ties, every soul that had to save itself at any price, every one who has cut off the right hand, put out the right eye, has been wrong. Oh, the right hand, the right eye, are always so good. There is so much to be said for them! You can make out so good a case! Oh, you are so young, you seem but a child, you don't know really what you are doing. You think of your duty to others. No one has taught you your duty to yourself."

"Oh," said Amethyst, with a sort of sad dignity, "I know much more about it all than you think."

She moved a little away from him, and sat down, then presently went on speaking out her thoughts. Sylvester seemed to her almost like an incarnation of the opposing force within her.

"I don't think it was wrong as I was—at least for some people there does not seem anything very right. Your father said I was to try for the least wrong—the rather better."

"Yes," said Sylvester, "the least wrong—the most right *for you!*"

"Then—something came over me. It all went flat. Then, you came and told me Lucian was coming back—and—and—I found out in another way, that if—if he brought back my feelings—I could and I would fight it all through—and *nothing* would stand against me. But oh—the feelings are all gone. I've forgotten him! So my feelings can't be worth much, and—and there doesn't seem enough to fight about—to give it all up and condemn myself and my sisters to a bad, miserable life—oh, so many degradations!"

"Lucian knows now how deeply he offended you," said Sylvester, swerving a little from his point, so much did he care what her feelings were.

"It's not that. It is that I have changed. But I—I couldn't wrong *him*. I couldn't marry *him* for—for an *establishment!*"

The last word burst out as if in quotation marks, with a passionate accent of self-contempt and scorn.

"What I want to say is," said Sylvester, "don't wrong yourself. Listen!—I believe in counsels of perfection. I don't judge all the women who have married as you say, and been good and saint-like and self-denying, for other people's sake.

But you—you hear another Voice. Even for your sisters' sake—listen to it."

Amethyst turned away, and hid her face against the back of her chair. She was not crying,—but a sense of being overwhelmed was coming upon her. The situation was beginning to make itself felt.

"When one has no feelings," she said, after a minute—"neither religious nor any others—there is nothing left but doing right."

"There *is* that left," he answered, coming nearer.

Another silence, then she faltered out—

"Of course—I haven't got my eyes shut. I do know all you mean—what marrying would be.—You think I couldn't expect to be helped to be good afterwards—doing it against my instincts. You think it would be so wrong, that it's worth turning life upside down to stop it—worth *what it will be like, not to do it?*"

"So wrong," said Sylvester, kneeling beside her chair, "that I would rather see you die than do it."

Another pause, then suddenly she stood up, and looked down into his face.

"I will not do it," she said. "I said no one helped me. That's not true. You have done a tremendous thing for me. Thank you!"

She held out her hands, and he put them to his lips; then, as he rose up, the inspiration that had brought him there seemed to die out, and left only trembling human passion in its stead. Nothing more was given him to say. He had really spoken in utter singleness of heart, altogether for her sake. Now, he felt that every word would be for his own.

He murmured an echo of her thanks—looked at her for a moment with white face and shining eyes, and went, without one conventional word of apology, or of parting.

When he got out into the street, he found that he could hardly stand. With an instinct of avoiding notice, he crossed over towards the railing of the square garden, and, finding the gate open, went in and managed to reach a bench close by, and sat there, till his head ceased to swim, and he could see and think clearly once more.

He almost felt as if he were waking from a dream. How could he have faced her with such daring words, and how had she come to listen with so much patience?

If he had saved her, he had done it at a cruel cost. He had not looked into her eyes, and touched her soul, without such growth of the passion within him as made his yearning a living pain, instead of a tender dream, or at least an endurable desire. His love had grown a thousand-fold in that short quarter of an hour. And she had listened to him as if he had been a voice in the air! And to what a struggle had he persuaded her!—he who took his own life so easily.

As Sylvester sat musing, he knew that his own words, or the love that had prompted them, had changed himself. He had no need to make any outward change in his life, but he knew, as he got up and walked slowly out of the garden and up the square, that his appeal to Amethyst had bound him to live it in a much more strenuous way.

Amethyst, when he left her, stood still, while a crimson blush spread over face, neck, and arms—a deep glow of shame, the reaction from the utter absence of self-consciousness with which she had listened. She had never thought of Sylvester Riddell, while his eyes were shining into hers, and his voice thrilling into her ears; now she felt as if the eyes and the voice would never leave her. Three times he had been concerned in her fate.

Now, he had told her nothing that she did not know before, but he had given her the impulse to act upon her own inner convictions.

Amethyst was a strong and resolute person, but she shuddered as she thought of the battle that lay before her. She had allowed the brilliant and delightful present to distract her mind from its issues, and to blind her eyes to the vanishing point of all her success. She had been so taken up with interests and amusements, and with the triumph of her beauty, that she had suffered herself to forget the nature of the act to which all was tending, had talked, and thought, and prepared for a worldly marriage, without allowing herself to realize what a marriage without love meant. The pomps and vanities of this wicked world had caught her in their toils.

So she had tied her own hands, and put herself in a false position, entangled herself in all sorts of counter obligations, which must be broken through at the cost of honour and faith.

When she turned round, not five minutes after Sylvester had left her, and saw Sir Richard Grattan coming into the room, she felt that in another five minutes all her power of resistance would be gone. She clasped her hands together behind her back, and stood straight up and waited. Sir Richard's face was disturbed, and not quite that of an eager lover.

"Miss Haredale," he said, in his harsh, full, resolute voice, "I have heard a good deal this morning to surprise me. But I am a man of honour, and in the face of these distressing circumstances, I come to renew the offer I have more than once made you, and I hope for a favourable answer."

"You have laid us under great obligations," said

Amethyst, a little more proudly than she would have dared to speak, if he had not referred to his own honour.

"I have acted pretty much with my eyes open, though I did not know of this last—misfortune. I consider it all quite worth my while. It won't be the last time, I dare say, that difficulties may arise, but I considered all that, or most of it, before I began to address you. I don't consider that my credit is in any way affected by other people's conduct. I have acted all through in the hope, the determination to win you, and, as my wife, no annoyances shall be suffered to approach you."

"Sir Richard," said Amethyst, "I wish to tell you the truth. I have been meaning to—to accept your proposals for a long time. Certainly I have given you reason to think I should. I have to tell you that I find, now, that it is utterly impossible. I beg your pardon. I have behaved very ill. But I cannot fulfil my intention."

Sir Richard gave a great start.

"I know what this means," he said abruptly; "some one has come between us. It is your old lover."

"No," said Amethyst, "the truth is your due. I refused Mr. Leigh's proposals. I solemnly assure you that you have no rival. There is no one else. I don't prefer any one. But—it is myself. I have found out that I cannot return your feelings—I never told you that I could. And I know now that I could not make you a good wife. If I married only for the sake of outside things, all the good part of me would die out. I never—never ought to have entertained the idea."

"I am quite aware," said Sir Richard, somewhat hotly, "that I am not the first in the field, nor the

only one. But I was given to understand that your early attachment was entirely at an end."

"It is so. There is no one that I wish to marry."

When Amethyst had made this assertion to Lucian Leigh, he had implicitly believed her, but as she raised her eyes to Sir Richard, she saw that he did not think that she was telling the truth. Probably he did not expect truth on such a subject from a young lady. She saw that it would be absolutely hopeless to make him understand the real state of her mind, and a sudden sense of violent recoil came to the aid of her courage.

He was very angry, but he made a strong effort to control himself and to behave well.

"I don't think I have deserved this caprice," he said.

"No, I don't think you have," said Amethyst, "you have offered me much more than I deserve. I have been very wrong; I will not pretend to you that I did not once mean to accept you. But I never shall do so now—never."

"It would be very unbecoming in me," said Sir Richard, "if I recalled any of the means by which I have endeavoured to recommend myself. Amethyst, don't drive me crazy. Don't you know that I worship you? I will not give you up. I've swallowed everything about your family. I am prepared to make a queen of you. There's nothing my money and your beauty won't command. You shall be the greatest lady, short of royalty, in England in five years' time. You'll take the lead in the county, and with it all, you'll never have reason to be ashamed of your husband. I've a fair square past behind me. My money's honestly come by, and, by heaven, there's a great future before me—and my wife. And I love you."

It was not badly done. It was all true. It was what she had meant her beauty to win for her.

"I can't," she said, turning white, and trembling; "you don't understand what I'm made of. If I loved you, I could be the splendid wife you want, but as I don't—I should hate all that—and very soon I should hate you!"

She spoke low, but in a voice full of passion. His colour rose, and he came close to her side.

"*Who* is it? Who has come between us?" he said, when there was the sound of a soft sweep and rustle, and Lady Haredale's light sweet voice was heard saying—

"Well, I think you have had time enough to settle it, Sir Richard. Am I to give up my little girl?"

CHAPTER XII.

ESCAPED.

THERE ensued for Amethyst some hours which were terrible to endure, and more terrible still to remember. Sir Richard Grattan, not without some dignity, withdrew to lay his case before Lord Haredale, and left the mother to plead his cause with her child. They had already told each other cynical truths, and now mother and daughter stood face to face, and Lady Haredale told Amethyst the truth without a softening word, without an ambiguous phrase. She told the facts of Lord Haredale's life, and the causes of his money troubles, and also of those of his son. She told her how he was likely to seek consolation for his disgraceful misfortunes, and made her understand the kind of company to which, if their heads once sank below water, they would be condemned. And then, did Amethyst suppose that she herself had been in love with Lord Haredale when she married him at eighteen, for his title, and because she knew her own fortune was all a myth? Amethyst was more lucky, she had got over her romance, Lady Haredale had had to manage hers after

marriage, and Sir Richard was a much better man than Lord Haredale had ever pretended to be.

And then the daughter replied that she was not likely to be better than father or mother; she was quite capable of another "romance," and what then?

"Then," said Lady Haredale, "you must do as others have done. Get out of it without a scandal, and stop in time."

"I should not stop in time in such a case."

"Oh yes, you would, my dear; you're not a fool. Leave all that to take care of itself, and do what's right now. I have never gone too far. I will tell you for your good—"

And Amethyst stood and listened to her mother's experiences, told in her mother's familiar voice—to her mother's view of where a woman could always stop, and yet how much might be ventured and no harm come. She listened with a dreadful comprehension of these principles of action, and with a still more dreadful certainty that she never could be certain of following them.

Before she could reply, her father came in upon her, pleading and entreating with her, and throwing himself on her mercy; then, when she stood like a stone, hardened by her mother's story, he turned upon her with a rage such as she had never imagined, broke out into violent, coarse language such as she had never heard, till she shrank and trembled with sheer physical terror. Then a sound of sobs broke on the scene, and there stood Miss Haredale, and Amethyst flung herself upon her, the real mother of her youth.

"They will kill me!" she cried; but Miss Haredale only wept afresh, and bemoaned all the misery, and gave Amethyst no real support at all. She was holding by another end of the tangle,

and began to speak of Carrie and Charles—and what was she to do? while Lord Haredale turned and swore at her, and the flood of wrath and argument surged away from Amethyst for a moment, and then turned back to include her once more. Strained as her nerves already were, she was so frightened at Lord Haredale's violent tones and gesture, that with a sobbing cry of "Oh, father—oh, father! don't strike me!" she turned and fled, every other feeling lost in a personal terror that had never crossed her imagination before.

"What a —— fool the girl is!" cried Lord Haredale; "as if I should hurt her. You've managed her confoundedly ill, my lady, to bring all this about."

"Well, I have," said Lady Haredale. "When one is so upset and so dreadfully anxious, one is really stupid. And Amethyst has your temper, my lord. I never saw a girl in such a passion, but I'll set it right presently. As for you, Annabel, if Carrie Carisbrooke is determined to stick to Charles, why not? It's a straw to cling to."

"I was a wicked woman to bring her near him," said Miss Haredale, sobbing; "her heart will be broken, and Amethyst's too."

"Not a bit of it," said Lady Haredale. "Amethyst has a sharp tongue, and, like Una, she's emotional. Dear me, so we all are! I was just now, myself, and very incautious. But I won't have the poor child frightened to death, my lord, and I think you'll have to beg her pardon."

She left the room, leaving the brother and sister alone, the latter still in tears, and Lord Haredale cooling down under his wife's shower of common sense.

"Well, Anna," he said presently, "it isn't the

first time that you have heard a man swear, at any rate. You know there's no disrespect intended."

"It is a long time, Haredale, since I lived with my relations," said Miss Haredale, dryly.

"Grattan doesn't swear," said Lord Haredale, with a slight accent of contempt, caused, perhaps, by the keen edge of intolerable and ill-requited obligation. "She'll be a thousand times better off if she marries him."

"Oh, she will," said Miss Haredale. "If only she can so feel it!"

"Well," said Lord Haredale, "her mother's clever enough; perhaps she'll bring her round."

His wrath had evaporated in its own violence, and he began to think how he could pass the morning least intolerably, since the haunts of his fellows were not likely to be made pleasant to him for the present. Miss Haredale was full of remorse and misery, but Sir Richard Grattan's offer represented to her the last straw to hold by, and she had not courage enough to back up Amethyst's resistance to it.

Amethyst meanwhile got up-stairs, and locked herself into her own room. Then she dropped down on the floor, not fainting, but in a sudden collapse of all her powers. The sudden news, on the day before, of Lucian's return, the intense excitement at the theatre, the expectation of Lucian's coming, the change of feeling when she saw him, the night of struggle with herself, the family disgrace, the high exaltation of Sylvester's appeal, the strain of resolution in her encounter with Sir Richard, the shame of what her mother had said to her, and still more, of what she had answered, the shock and terror of her father's unseemly violence, had worn out all her strength.

She lay perfectly still, without conscious thought or feeling, till gradually her strong nerves began to recover themselves, and a flicker of light came into her heart. She had broken free.

For many weeks she had been holding herself in, keeping herself in a prison of necessity, expediency, and pleasure, refusing to think long-stretching thoughts, to feel high-reaching feelings, to pray genuine prayers. She had been afraid to break through the soft, tempting satisfactions of the world's good things, afraid to shake the foundations of the philosophy by which she justified her choice to herself.

Now she was free, out in the rain and the storm, with the wide world around her, and the wide sky above her head—free to be lonely, dissatisfied, miserable, to long and to dread, to love and to hate, to be all of herself once more.

"The snare is broken, and I am delivered!" she said; and great vigorous throbs of painful life came back to her soul.

Una's voice broke in upon her.

"Amethyst, darling—won't you let me in? Dearest, do open the door."

Amethyst rose, still trembling and unsteady, and unlocked the door, then dropped back into a low chair, as Una ran in, and started at the sight of her face.

"Oh, my dear, you are half-killed," she said. "Wait one moment."

She went away again, and came back with a glass of wine in her hand.

"You must drink this. It's my turn to be nurse now."

'I'm not ill," said Amethyst, taking the wine; but she laid her head on Una's shoulder, and submitted passively to her caresses.

"Now," she said, after a few minutes, "tell me all you know about things."

"I know it all," said Una. "We heard a great deal, and then mother came and told us. She was crying, and she said that she had been so much upset, that she'd actually made a scene, which was quite against her principles, and frightened you. But she says she hasn't 'said die' yet, so she is going to take Kat and Tory to the duchess's garden-party, and 'see how she can represent things.' They had better see a great party once, she said, if they never could again. And Sir Richard is to come again, then she thinks you won't refuse him."

"Oh yes, I shall, Una—I have," said Amethyst, with a fresh ring in her voice for a moment.

"Then it seems that now," continued Una, "it is quite impossible for Charles to marry, and Aunt Anna does nothing but cry, and repent bitterly of having thrown Carrie in his way. But Carrie turned round like a little fury, and said that she had told Charles that she liked him, and so she did, and that she meant to keep her word, and she has appealed to her uncle. He *must* have known all along how wrong it was. Isn't it hard upon her?"

"Yes," said Amethyst, "but I must get through my own business first. I am going to write Sir Richard a note which will stop him from coming, and you must take care that he gets it in time."

There was a vigour in her manner which astonished Una, as she rose and bathed her face, and wrote a few lines in a fairly steady hand.

"DEAR SIR RICHARD,

"I will not let you deceive yourself nor be deceived by others about me. I did intend to

accept your offer, for I wished to be content with all the good things you would give me. But I cannot, and I shall never change my mind again. I cannot ask you to forgive me, but I acknowledge that I have behaved very ill to you. You have been most generous. All I can do now, is to spare you doubt and delay. I beg you to take this as a final refusal from

"AMETHYST HAREDALE."

Amethyst knew that her letter was abrupt and outspoken, but in the effort to leave no doubt behind, she could do the ungracious and cruel thing in no softer fashion.

She gave the letter to Una, with strict injunctions to say nothing about it, but to take care that it was sent at once. Then she threw herself down on the bed, and, when Una came back again, she found her dead asleep, her face white and still, her limbs relaxed, in the reaction from the intense strain which she had been enduring. While she slept, Lady Haredale got herself up in a marvellously charming toilette, and drove off to her great garden-party with Kattern, full of the unexpected pleasure, and Tory, looking unwontedly serious. Miss Haredale and Carrie were shut up in their own rooms.

Una had been called down-stairs by her mother before she started, to receive orders to take care that Amethyst saw Sir Richard—orders which Una may be forgiven for receiving in silence.

She sat down in the drawing-room to collect her senses a little, and to wonder what would happen next, when there was a step behind her, and she turned and saw her brother. He came slowly down the long room towards her, looking pale and ill, and with that look of being down on his luck,

which, though he was perfectly well-dressed, gave him the air of being out at elbows.

"The fellows said you were alone, Una, so, as you're a kind little girl, I came to speak to you. It's all up now, and I want you to tell Carrie so."

"But, Charles—had you—is it because of what happened at Epsom?"

"Well, no, my dear, not exactly. But there are plenty of other things for Clyste to rout up, you see. I never was so clear from—difficulties—as I gave Grattan and his lordship to understand. No fellow ever can go to the bottom of his affairs, you see. I always knew that whitewashing me couldn't be done. There's not money enough, and I haven't impudence enough, Una, to carry it out. So I'm going to make myself scarce again."

"But, Charles—what shall you do?"

"Oh, well, there are ways and means of which you don't know anything, and I know myself down among them; I was a fool to try this business. But I liked Carrie's little round face, and if I'd been a better fellow, or if being a bad fellow was the sort of thing she thinks it is, I might have tried. But *you* ought to know a little more about it than she does, Una."

"Yes, I never did see how you could marry her."

"I never had a chance, Una. Blanche and I were left to the worst lot of servants ever known. Our nursemaid was a bad one to begin with. Then your mother first flattered and made much of me when I was a rough lout, and then turned upon me, and set me all across with his lordship. And then you know how things go with a fellow."

Una did know, much better than it was well that she should, the hopeless history of her brother's career.

"Does Grattan stick to Amethyst?" he said.

"Yes, but she has refused him. She does not like him."

"Well," said Charles, "it doesn't matter what she does, men will always run after her. But I say, Una, tell her to keep clear of Carisbrooke. He has made ducks and drakes with some of Carrie's money, and that was why he was so ready to consent to marry her to me. But he's regularly gone upon Amethyst in the process. Don't you know he was Blanche's first love, when she was staying away with those hunting friends of hers, the Carshaltons? He carried on with her, and spoiled her chances when she was sixteen. He always had the sort of talk to take a girl's fancy. He's a very poor lot, so tell Carrie—"

"I'm here, Mr. Haredale," said a resolute little voice, as Carrie Carisbrooke, pale and tear-stained, came into the room. "I've not been deceived, I always knew that you had been—a dissipated man. But Miss Haredale said you had repented, and I mean to keep my word, and to help you through your troubles; I shouldn't think of going back because of family misfortunes."

"But I can't do it, Carrie," said Charles, in his odd, half-shamefaced, half-rough voice. "I can't marry you, my dear, as you'd see, if I could tell you anything about it, or if you could understand, which you couldn't—please God you never will. Good-bye."

"Then didn't you ever really care for me?" interposed Carrie, with a sudden flash.

Charles looked at her and then at Una, and shook his head.

"I'll never forget you, Carrie," he said, "nor your having liked me. I'd have married you if I could. Good-bye, Una. Will you give me a kiss?"

Una put her arms round his neck.

"Oh, Charles," she whispered, "don't give up altogether. Indeed—indeed—He does save sinners. He always went after the bad ones."

Charles looked into her eager, tear-filled eyes.

"Why, you're the sort that can persuade people to turn religious," he said. "Good-bye, little Una."

He kissed her very affectionately, then took hold of Carrie's hands.

"Good-bye," he said. "Between you, you've made me wish I'd had a chance of being a decenter fellow."

He stooped down, and kissed her forehead quickly and shyly, then went hurriedly away. Poor Carrie made no further protest. She cried bitterly, as well she might; for her first fresh fancy, and her girlish peace, had been sacrificed to the unjustifiable effort to escape from the inevitable consequences that follow on sinful lives.

Una stood still for a moment. Ideas always came to her in sudden flashes, and, with her erring, hopeless brother's last words, there came before her the momentary vision of a possible future for herself.

PART III.

THE STORY: AS FAR AS IT IS TOLD.

"Her days with others shall the sweeter be,
For those brief days she spent in loving me."

CHAPTER I.

THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD.

NOT very long after this abrupt conclusion of so much that had appeared to be but just begun, and in process of continuance, the care-taker at Cleverley Hall uncovered and set to rights three or four of the smaller rooms, and received the four Miss Haredales, who came there to wait till the family plans were somewhat matured, to leave some of their belongings in one locked-up room, while the rest of the house was prepared for letting; and to select and pack all that it was necessary to take with them, for what was likely to be some months, at least, of visiting and wandering.

An inhabited oasis in the midst of brown holland and shutters is not cheerful; but the last few days before the break-up in London had been so wretched that the girls were all thankful for any change, and Amethyst, in particular, packed, contrived, and planned with a vigour and energy that would fain have made the little work into much. Freedom gave her a sense of eager, strenuous life, and there was nothing before her but a long stretch of idle, tiresome days, made lonely by uncongenial companionship.

"How I hate it all!" she thought; but her hatred was living and vigorous, and there was a ring in her voice and a spring in her feet, as she moved about the empty house, which had never been there in the Eaton Square drawing-rooms.

The afternoon was hot, tea was on the schoolroom table. Kattern, with her pretty face markedly sullen, was slowly sipping her tea. Una lay idly back in a corner of the sofa, and Tory was sitting on the deep ledge of the window, holding the end of her immense plait of hair in her hand, and contemplating Amethyst's quick, careful packing of small valuables, with a curious elvish expression of critical observation.

"I have been informing the neighbours," she said, after a silence, "that is, our good Rector's worthy sister, as my lady used to call her, that we are going abroad for education—for Kat and me. But that first we are going to pay visits to some old friends. Can anything sound more creditable?"

"I don't care how it sounds," burst out Kattern; "it's very dull and disappointing. I wish I was the eldest. I wish *I* had had even Una's chances! I wouldn't have thrown people over at the last minute. *I* would have got married, and not been called a *fiasco* in the society papers. I hate going abroad. We may get a little fun out of the visits, but I shall be sent on the dullest, and I haven't near as many frocks as Amethyst and Una."

"You have quite as many frocks as you want at present," said Amethyst; "when you will have any more is another question."

"Well," said Tory reflectively, "I mean to keep respectable. The Kirkpatricks' and Lorrimores' aren't very nice places for little girls. I shall have to take care of the rest of you. I'm very

tired of our line of life, I should like to go to school. How much better good conduct pays! I dislike being ruined, and having a shady reputation."

"I hate having all one's pleasure stopped," said Kattern.

"Don't be a cross cat," returned Tory. "If we go for to quarrel, as girls in goody story-books do, when the author wants them to be naughty for a change, we shall get *no* comfort in life. Goody! What a story I could write! I know! I'll be a sensational, realistic author, and make a fortune. Experience is better for that than education. Come along, Katty, let us take farewell of our childish haunts. They weren't our childish haunts. But no matter—"

She dragged Kattern up from her chair, and out of the room, as she spoke; while Amethyst laughed.

"I believe there's something staunch about Tory, at bottom," she said. "I'd rather trust her than Kat, among shady people."

Una moved a little, and watched Amethyst for a few moments in silence.

"Amethyst," she said, suddenly, "setting aside being married, what would you like best to do with your life?"

"I think I should like to enlist for a soldier," said Amethyst with a laugh.

"But really?"

"Really. Oh, I could keep school, I always liked teaching. When I'm twenty-one, I shall think about it. We shall none of us ever have enough money to be comfortable, if we don't marry. What can become of us? I think, perhaps, I shall write to Miss Halliday and consult her, though I would rather teach in a High School than go

back to St. Etheldred's. I think there would be more life in it. I think one's title might be swallowed, and, as for my beauty reputation, one would be the safest of young women, for there never would be anybody one would care to look twice at."

"I suppose they wouldn't like it, if rows of young men went to church to look at you?"

"You're thinking of some Miss Pinkerton's academy. Don't you know that one's own life would be quite independent of the schoolwork? And I might make such a line possible for Tory. There's a great deal of spirit in the life."

"Would it go on being enough for you?"

Amethyst laughed again, but this time with some bitterness.

"Perhaps not," she said, shortly. "I wonder what would! But there are some things I should like to take up again."

"Amethyst—in some ways you are more like what you were when first you came home, than you have been since—since you were engaged to Lucian."

"I am free," said Amethyst. "That past is over really, over now for good and all. It has gone, I don't know where; and I have got, thank heaven! to reconcile myself to no good fortune. I need not tell myself any more lies, nor pare down my feelings to suit my fate. If I am a High School mistress, and want the moon and the sun and the stars, why, I can cry for them. But if I'd married that rich, good, generous man, I should never have dared to wish for anything as long as I lived. Every wish would have opened the gates into the universe. Well, now I'm outside the bars, and it *is* the universe, and full of stars, and I can look at them, if I can't have them."

As Amethyst uttered this tirade, she lifted up

her head, and her lovely face glowed with eagerness. Una listened, but her soul gave no response. Amethyst saw her blank expression, and stopped with a blush.

"Oh," she said, "if you only knew what it is to let myself go! Of course I know we are in for a hateful existence—troubles and bothers of every sort. But I feel as if I should pull through! Nothing can be worse than the last week or two."

"It has been bad enough," said Una, sighing.

"Life has a great many sides, as I always told you," said Amethyst. "Work is a great help, and, as Tory says, I'm tired of men. I wish I could go to Newnham or Girton, and take a first-class. But who's to pay?"

"You, Amethyst! Oh, don't take to being blue because you're disappointed!"

"You little behind-the-world fossil! Blue! Cultured is the proper expression. And how am I disappointed? Una, I'm more in love with my real true natural self than with any one else at present. And I *should* like to go to college—I read an article about it the other day. I should like a little room to fit up, and to have tea with my friends, and debates, and discussions, and new ideas. Then I needn't think about being married for the next five years. But there, that packing is finished. I'll go for a walk, the country is delightful after London."

She went away as she spoke, and Una heard her run down the long staircase, light of foot, and seemingly light of heart.

"*I* shall never be able to 'let myself go,' as long as I live," thought she, with a weary sigh. "And I see no stars anywhere. Only—sometimes—that great Light—and then darkness."

Amethyst walked through the deserted garden,

rejoicing in her freedom, for she was free of regrets for Lucian, as well as of pledges to Sir Richard Grattan. She could laugh a little cynically at the girlish dream in which Lucian had seemed an ideal of perfection; she could give thanks, with bated breath, that she had not tied herself to Sir Richard; she could not but be thankful to Sylvester for having saved her; but she looked back upon her interview with him with a sense of shame, as she remembered that he, her lover, had pleaded with her not to debase her womanhood by marrying a man whom she did not love, and had had to plead, long and earnestly, before he won the day. She hoped that the love he had declared had been but the love of a poet's dream; it seemed so, since he had never followed it up, for she could never wish to see him again, though she hoped never to fall again below his standard of noble maidenhood. His voice seemed to ring in her ears: "I would rather see you die than do it."

She wondered what Mr. Carisbrooke thought of the end of all her prospects. Had he really been Blanche's first lover, as Una declared Charles to have said? Perhaps there was another side to that old story, and Blanche had broken his heart, not he Blanche's.

But she had nothing now to do with any of them. Her life was her own, to begin afresh. But what lay before her? The life of intellectual interests and youthful striving was altogether out of her reach. All that was likely was a bad imitation of her London success. She knew well enough the sort of "old friends" among whom her parents' rank, and her own reputation as a beauty, would still make her a desired guest. She had had glimpses of such society in the last two years.

"I am only twenty," she thought. "I am strong and I am clever, and I think that I have proved that I am brave, and I should like to be good. Yet it seems that there is no life worth living, open to me. What am I to do? There's plenty of spring in me. Free? I'm tied up with cobwebs. If any one could tell me what to do?"

As she looked round, as if in search of an answer, she saw Mr. Riddell coming towards her, along the very path by which he had come on that day when his few words of advice had seemed to offer her a little help in her early helplessness; when his kindness had given her a little comfort, though all her world had then been unkind.

Amethyst believed in the existence of good people. That faith she perhaps owed to the capacity for goodness in herself. She knew that Mr. Riddell would never tell her anything that he did not himself believe to be helpful and true. He asked after her family with kindly courtesy.

"We shall see you and your sisters, I hope, at the Rectory," he said. "My sister and I are alone, for my son has gone to Scotland."

Amethyst coloured a little, she wondered how much the Rector knew; but she was too worldly-wise to ignore the troubles.

"I suppose, Mr. Riddell," she said, "that you know why we left London so suddenly?"

"Yes, my dear," he said gently, "I know all that is to be said on that matter. I am sorry."

"It is a very unhappy prospect for myself and my sisters," said Amethyst, with straightforward dignity. "I don't in the least see how we are to lead lives that can be at all good. You were very kind to me once—you told me to try and be a little better, if I could not be good. May I speak to you now?"

"Surely," said Mr. Riddell; then after a moment he added, "My son has told me how fatally he was once mistaken, and how cruel an injury he once did you."

"Yes," said Amethyst, "but that is all at an end." She paused; then said, with a deep blush, "Your son has done me a great service now, far greater than the harm he did then. I don't want to speak about what is all over. If I could work or study, I could be quite happy. Indeed, I do care for *many* other things besides society and admiration; but there is such a wretched life before us. We shall never see good or clever people. And I do not feel religion as Una does, though indeed, Mr. Riddell, I wish more to be good than for anything else in the world, though I have not been good lately."

There was something in the simplicity of this final appeal—coming from this rarely beautiful girl, with her look of belonging to the great ones of the earth—that was very touching. Mr. Riddell did not answer her for a minute, then he said—

"That trying to be a little better of which you spoke, that *relative* goodness that no lot can make impossible—it is important to be clear as to what is meant by better. Is it to make life a little smoother, or a little nobler, each day?"

Amethyst looked up as if these words struck her.

"And, Amethyst," said Mr. Riddell, stopping in his walk and taking her by the hand; "there is no need for you to stop at a little—

> 'Pray to be perfect—though material heave
> Forbid the spirit so on earth to be.'

Your life is very full of trial, you have high

thoughts and good thoughts. What hinders you from leading it like a saint?"

She looked at him still, but in silence.

"You say you don't 'feel religion.' The word is a little vague. You have felt the guiding hand of God, and He speaks to you in that love of goodness which you possess. He *will* speak to you, believe me, with a yet clearer voice. He has a great deal yet to say to you. Aim spiritually at the very highest perfection; and, for the rest, my dear, you must indeed try for 'a little.' Perhaps a little study might keep your mind fresh, and, though I suppose religious observances will often be difficult to you, do what you can with a little. You have nearly all your life before you, and there is time in it for a great many things."

A great hope shone in Amethyst's face, a sense of vigour stole again into her soul. The light dawned in the depths of her earnest eyes, as she still looked up into her teacher's face.

"The hope of holiness," said Mr. Riddell, "is an inspiration great enough to set against the greatness of the world's temptations."

"Yes," said Amethyst, in full deep tones.

"You see that light, follow it, and you shall have more," he said solemnly; then, with a change of tone to his usual simple and fatherly manner, he said—"Come and see Miss Riddell, and bring the girls with you. She will give you something to read up, or something to do—something interesting, you know."

Amethyst laughed a little, and gave his hand a grateful pressure.

"Thank you," she said earnestly, and sped away.

Mr. Riddell looked after her, watching her quick

and vigorous step. Then he took off his glasses and wiped them.

"Poor Syl!" he said, as he turned away. "He must have much patience in seeking his Iris. She is in the distance—in the distance, as yet."

CHAPTER II.

'AYONT THE ISLE OF SKYE.'

"CLEVERLEY RECTORY.

"*Aug. 3rd.*

"MY DEAR SYL,

"I found your letter very good reading. Thinking of you far away in Ultima Thule, in the scenes of that dearest of books to my youth, *The Pirate*, quite stirs my blood, and the Fitful Head and the Stones of Stennis come vividly into my mind. By the way, I hope you have 'read' *The Pirate*. If not, I will send you a shilling copy, that you and Lucian may remedy the defects of your education. Here we have been seeing a great deal of the four Haredale girls, and lately something of their mother, who joined them a few days ago. Lady Haredale is a wonderful woman. She has nearly made me believe her to be the most unselfish of people by the cheerful, matter-of-course way in which she accepts their ruined condition. Lord Haredale is abroad. She and the two elder girls are to pay some visits, and then join him. Kattern and Tory are to be sent to their aunt at Silverfold. Miss Carisbrooke is still with her, and her part in all the strange story I don't under-

stand. The girls are to go to classes at St. Etheldred's School. Tory has brains; but I am afraid she will be a fish out of water. I should not myself like to have charge of Miss Kattern; nor indeed of Una, though she is an interesting creature, and might do well in good hands. Poor child, she is likely to be in very bad ones, I fear. She has taken a great fancy to Miss Waterhouse, my old friend, who has been having a holiday here from her work among the East London wild girls and women. Una seems never to tire of hearing of them, and has undertaken to sew for them. I hope she may keep up with anything so practical. As for Amethyst, your father calls her a fine, brave, *growing* creature; but what a life lies before her! She has not half lived out her girlhood, in spite of all her troubles, and would be ready for all the wholesome interests and natural ambitions of clever, thoughtful girls. I have put her in the way of some correspondence-lessons in Latin and mathematics, and supplied her with the books. She means to work, when she can, with a view to a possible future. She is anxious to show that she is not all society beauty. But, dear me, how beautiful she is! I don't see how her mind is to rival her face, and how she will be thrown away!

"I could find it in my heart to wish she had married the rich baronet; but your father shakes his head, and says 'No.' I believe the whole family are to meet in the south of France in the winter. Lady Haredale smiles, and says she can't think what they are going to live on.

"My love to Lucian. How long do you stay with him?

"Your loving aunt,

"MARGARET RIDDELL."

Sylvester read this letter as he and Lucian lay on the short fine turf of a bluff headland in the Isle of Orkney, not far from Kirkwall, looking over the northern sea, now blue and dancing in summer sunshine. The air was sweet, clear, and bracing; white sea-birds floated over the sparkling waves; a lark sang high in the pure sharp air; the charm of spring had hardly yet departed from the far advanced summer; tiny flowers sprinkled the down, and the little hardy black-faced lambs that cropped them, were still in the prettiest stage of their youth.

"My education is in advance of the shilling copy," said Sylvester, reading the first sentence of his letter aloud; and then, after a moment's hesitation, passing it to his companion.

When he had answered Lucian's letter of invitation to join him at Oban, he had briefly acknowledged the truth of the guess indicated by the return of the photograph; but since then no word on the subject, so near the hearts of both, had passed between them.

Lucian had regained much of his usual look and manner, and did not appear to be occupied with anything but the business of his yacht and with the places that he had come to look at.

Now he put down his pipe, which he was preparing to re-light, and, leaning on his elbow, read the letter through, more than once perhaps, for he was a long time silent. Then he looked up at Sylvester.

"I was a fool," he said, "a fool to be gulled by any evidence against her denial. I ought to have known her better. I wasn't man enough to t ust her. That's why she has forgotten me."

Though Sylvester had often said as much to himself, the avowal was startling, in Lucian's slow,

clear voice, the accents hardly varying from those in which a few minutes before he had asked his companion to give him a light.

"You were so young," he said. "But how—"

"How do I know it now? I don't know. I found it out by seeing her again. *You* understand her better."

"I'd give my right hand never to have been forced to meddle with the matter," said Syl.

"I want to say," said Lucian, "that I'm not a dog in the manger. If you could get her—I—I—I think it would be the best thing for her. I—hope you'll try."

"I have no reason to think she could care for me," said Sylvester hurriedly; "but—well, Lucy—of course you know I shall try—some day. And thank you."

There was silence again, and then Lucian said—

"I'm going, as I told you, to try Toppings. That's what I have to look to. My mother will be glad my chance is over."

"She wishes you to settle down?"

"Yes, of course. I could never have anything said about the past—and *her*, from my mother's point of view; and knowing that she felt so strongly, has made a sort of separation. But I shall ask her if she likes to bring the girls to Toppings. The life there would suit her."

"But, Lucy," said Sylvester, "why should you give up the white bears that you had set your heart on? Two years hence, as you said, is quite time enough for you to settle down at Toppings."

Lucian was silent for a minute, then he said—

"I don't care much about the bears, so it's better to do what suits other people. Besides, I

had rather know what happens to her, and I couldn't hear if I was in the Arctic regions."

Sylvester sat up and looked at him. It had never occurred to him to think that Lucian suffered from solitude or want of sympathy, or indeed to think that his life had been permanently saddened by his disappointment. He had always believed the interests which he picturesquely symbolized as "white bears" to be enough for the strong, healthy, active youth; and even his faithfulness to Amethyst had seemed to Sylvester to spring more from a sense of what was due to himself, than from involuntary yearning for her.

"I suppose," Lucian went on, before he could speak, "that you meant—her—in that poem of yours all the time."

"Well, yes," said Syl, half laughing, "I suppose I did."

"It's quite true," said Lucian, "I couldn't say all that; but there seems nothing else to think of, and icebergs would make no difference at all."

"I didn't think, Lucy, that you would spend your life in looking for the rainbow's end."

"I shall not. There are plenty of things to do. But, since I misjudged her so, there can be no peace till she is happy. You see, at first, I felt as if I could never get over knowing that I had been wrong, when all the comfort I'd ever had in the matter, had been thinking that giving her up was the only right thing to do. I went once that wretched afternoon—right up to the Hall—and then I turned back, and thought I wouldn't be made a fool of—when all the while I was making a fool of myself."

"We were all infernal fools," said Sylvester.

"Then," said Lucian, "I remembered that it didn't matter so much about me, since I had

found out that she was—what I'd always thought her. I'm glad now it was all my fault and not hers. Something in your poem put that into my head."

He gave a little smile as he spoke, and Sylvester noticed for the first time how grave his face had grown. It had never been exactly lively, but surely the weight on the straight, clearly-marked brows was new.

"I suppose I hadn't given her up really," he went on after a minute, "because I seem to have to begin quite new. It's odd how hard it is to believe that I'm going to settle down at Toppings. I feel as if something must happen to prevent it. But it won't now. It will be all right if she is happy—and good. So I mean what I said, Syl; I hope you'll get her. I think I always knew you did love her, and that made me shy off when you meant to be kind to me. Then it will be all right—for her."

He sat up and looked out over the sunny sea. The ache at his heart was hard to bear, all the harder perhaps that even now he had hardly found the right words for it. There seemed so little to look forward to. Sylvester, full of hopes and fears, interests and longings, with a future from which Amethyst was not shut out, and able to rejoice even in the suffering which brought to him so intense a life, could hardly realize the passion that only made itself felt as want and loss.

"Let's walk on," said Lucian presently. "We had better look up some of the *Pirate* places by and by. We might get down to the beach now, perhaps."

There was a little rough path, a mere sheep-track, leading off the headland down a steep descent to the shore. The turf gave place to

jagged rocks and loose stones. Lucian went on with rapid, practised tread, and presently turned off from the descent and followed the track along the cliff side. The rocks grew more precipitous, and the track narrower, the sea dashed up at their feet in great breakers of foam.

"You don't get dizzy, do you, Syl?" he called back; "this is rather a nasty corner."

"No," said Syl. "I can look at the soap-suds."

"All right. Here's a splendid great wash-tub."

He turned round the rock, there was a little crash. Sylvester hurried forward, but the path and Lucian had alike disappeared.

"All right, only a slip," he shouted from below, and, looking down, Syl saw that he had caught by the rough projections of the rock, and was holding himself on by hands and feet, above the jagged rocks and the boiling sea. Sylvester threw himself on his face, and stretching out his hand, caught Lucian's wrist.

"Can you pull yourself up a little nearer?" he said.

The sea roared in his ears, and foamed under his eyes, beneath Lucian's upturned face.

"Let go; give me your hand," said Lucian.

Sylvester obeyed, and Lucian loosened the hold of his right hand from the rock, and grasped Sylvester's, holding on to a firmer projection with his left. Then he cautiously raised himself, not a very difficult feat for so active a person—another moment, and he would be safe; but, as he moved and strained upwards, to his horror Sylvester saw the face beneath him whiten and change.

"I—can't—I'm hurt. Don't pull me," gasped Lucian.

Sylvester grasped the straining hand with all his strength, but his own position was cramped and insecure, he could do no more than hold on. If

Lucian fainted! Lucian shut his eyes and moved his hand till it grasped Sylvester's wrist, and gave him a firmer hold. Then he made another attempt to lift himself up, and then—. He opened his eyes, his whole face drawn with agony, and looked up at Sylvester. Sylvester held himself firm with every force of body and soul, but the forces were beginning to fail, the ground was slipping beneath him. Then—Lucian unclasped his fingers, and slipped slowly down the rough face of the rock, and fell backwards, not into the sea, but on to the rough, slippery rocks, just above the foaming water, where he lay motionless on his back.

Then Sylvester staggered up on to his feet, and, leaning his back against the rock, steadied his limbs, which trembled with the strain he had put upon them. Another moment, and, a pace or two further back, he had let himself down from the path, and with risk and difficulty reached the ledge of rock on which Lucian lay. It was so narrow and unsafe that he could not get beside him, could not see his face, only his fair hair shining in the sun, could but just reach forward and touch his lips and brow. He called to him, but found his voice was only a sob, inaudible to himself. Lucian lay motionless, and Sylvester looked round for any chance of help. He saw that the tide was going down, and leaving more and more rocks bare beneath him. The sea was smooth enough, the foaming eddy was only caused by the hollowing of the rocks. The sky was blue and bright; he could, as his nerves stilled a little, hear the lambs bleat above his head. Then Lucian's head quivered under his hand, there was a movement, and then a sharp cry of agonizing pain—a sound which, in a grown man's voice, Sylvester, a home-bred man of peace, had never heard before.

"Lucy—dear boy, I can't reach you. I am here. You are terribly hurt."

There was no answer, except that the cry was stifled into a moan, and Lucian turned his face a little towards Sylvester's hand, pressing his cold cheek against it.

Then Sylvester, clinging on to the shelving rock, shouted with all his strength; and his shout was answered from the down above. What he uttered in his outcry of hope he never knew; but there was an answer back.

"All right! Hold on—we're coming round."

There was a dreadful pause, and then on the lower rocks, now bared by the ebbing tide, three young men, in tourist garb, appeared, scrambling round from behind, and came near enough for speech.

"What is it? A fall—are you both hurt? Good heavens! It's Riddell of Cuthbert's! There's footing now—the tide's going out."

And in another minute Sylvester was pulled down from his dangerous perch and held up, as he staggered for a moment with cramp and stiffness, by the strong hands of three of his own scholars—youths whose faces at lecture had never greatly interested him, but who seemed now very angels of deliverance.

"Are you hurt, sir? Lean on me, Mr. Riddell. We can soon get a boat up to the rocks."

"Can we reach him? He fell over the cliff."

The footing was much less secure beneath the spot where Lucian lay, but beneath again was a broad slab of rock now laid bare; and between them all they managed to lift Lucian, now quite senseless, and lay him down with his head on Sylvester's knee. Then two of the lads went off

to get a boat which could be brought up to a little strip of sand below at low tide, and the other remained to give what help he could.

Lucian moved a little again presently, when some whiskey, which the young men were carrying on their walking tour, had been put upon his lips and temples. He knew Sylvester's voice and whispered—

"Are you safe, Syl?"

"Oh, yes. But you—can you say where you are hurt?"

"I'm glad I let go," murmured Lucian; while it came over Sylvester with a flash of certainty that the clasping hand had not given way from faintness, but had loosed its hold rather than risk pulling him over. "I am—done for," gasped Lucian. "I am hurt—inside—I can't speak—Mother—my love—and *her*."

He sank again into unconsciousness, and Howard, the young undergraduate, put his arm round Sylvester to support him as he held Lucian's weight, and put the whiskey-flask to his lips.

"Is he your brother?" he whispered.

"No; my friend, and he has given his life for mine. Oh, my God! Can the boat get there?"

It came at last, and as they lifted Lucian into it, there was a sob of pain that showed life at least. And life, Sylvester tried to feel, meant hope.

CHAPTER III.

COMMONPLACE.

"REALLY, Amethyst, I don't see how I am to manage, if we pay many more visits. You see, all my things were got for the season, and I haven't got an autumn gown or jacket that's fit to be seen; and I *can't* go to a hunt-breakfast in a summer hat, and just look at this one."

The speaker was Una Haredale, one lovely autumn day in late October, as she stood by the wardrobe in her bed-room in Mrs. Lorrimore's country house, and displayed its contents ruefully to her sister.

The view from the window had all the charm of exquisite rural peace. The woods in every tint of gold and russet stretched away over wide out-spreading country beyond the green slopes of the park where single trees blazed and shone in their autumn dresses; cattle and sheep dotted the grass between and beneath them. Restharrow, as the house was called, looked the very home of quiet and virtuous content. But the house-party who were staying with Mrs. Lorrimore contrived to

amuse themselves, and Restharrow was not regarded as a quiet house.

"Well, Una, I don't know what is to be done. I haven't an idea how long my lady means to leave us here, and stay at the Fitzpatricks'. I've got exactly seven and sixpence left, and if mother sends us more money—she must, of course, before we go away—heaven knows where she will get it from. You must wear my gray hat and jacket to-morrow, and your own red skirt."

"And you?"

"I'll do with the brown tweed. Who is there to see that matters?"

"How I hate this house!" said Una, dropping into a straw chair by the window, and stretching her arms above her head.

"I don't think it's as bad as the Fitzpatricks'."

"Perhaps not, when the card-playing set is there, but it's more rowdy. I never did see the fun of chasing men up and down stairs, and setting booby-traps in their bedrooms."

"Nothing would ever induce me to do such a thing," said Amethyst scornfully.

"You have only to choose what you will do. They'll all come after you for the sake of saying afterwards they've been in with you. But—I shall never be a good girl, Amethyst. I can't keep out of the fray. I want them to talk to me, and I know how to make them. Then one gets led on. No, I don't bear-fight and romp; but oh, Amethyst, I talk—I say such horrid things—just things that make people stare and wonder if I *can* mean it. Oh, how I hate men!" stamping her foot. "They *delight* in making girls sail near the wind, and then, how they talk of us! That's what Tony used to make me do when I was little. How he used to

laugh! And the books," went on Una, after a pause. "When do we ever see one, French or English, that you'd like Sylvester Riddell, or any nice man, to see you read? Oh, if men in general liked girls to be decent, how easy goodness would be!"

"Well," said Amethyst, "if we are to be good, it certainly won't be because we don't hear of wickedness, either in books or in real life. But I wouldn't say what I was ashamed of, to please any one. And I'm sure, darling, you hardly ever do."

"You're a sweet comforter," said Una, kissing her. "My dear old mother-confessor! But really I sometimes hear things that make me think that my lady brought us up in a pattern way. Well, I believe Mr. and Mrs. Jackson are pattern people, so let us hope the hunt-breakfast will be highly proper too. Half an hour before lunch. I'll do some sewing."

"You are a pattern girl about your East End work, at any rate."

"Oh, but, Amethyst, I like to hear from Miss Waterhouse about the girls. I do feel as if I exactly understood how hard it is for them to be good, when they want so to be *bad*, you see, and know just how; and how getting fond of her is such a help to them. And she tells them that I care when she gives them the things I make. If I only worked better!"

This was the fourth of a set of visits which Amethyst and Una had paid, sometimes alone, and sometimes with their mother. One of these visits had been to the Fowlers at the country-house which was part of Mrs. Fowler's fortune, and, little as the girls had wished to go there, they had

found Mrs. Fowler far the kindest friend they met in their wandering life. She was very good to the lonely girls, though they never knew in what light Major Fowler had represented their story to her; and Una was loyal and brave, and resisted even the temptation of not being tempted by notice from her host. But the visit was a great strain on her, she felt the force of the temptations in her path, and did not know what upward growth was indicated by her knowing them to be temptations. She was too young and too impressionable not to be influenced by the atmosphere around her; outward helps were very few, and the struggle was hard within her. Still there were moments of peace, times which taught her what a holy life might be, times which upheld and uplifted her, the poor sinful girl who was trying to be a saint.

Amethyst's troubles were of a different sort. She had left Cleverley with several growing purposes and intentions, and with a strong desire, an earnest wish to win that nobleness of character of which Mr. Riddell had spoken, a wish that had always been as salt within her, but which Sylvester had touched with fire. She threw all the weight of her beauty on the side of maidenly conduct and modest speech, and there was neither man nor woman in the free-and-easy, careless-tongued set among whom she moved, who would take a liberty with Amethyst Haredale. But she was bored to death. There was nothing to do, nothing to know, nothing to feel. She was like a wild, strong creature in a cage. She worked at her Latin and mathematics in the early morning, she played tennis with vigorous interest in the game, and none in her partners, she took long walks by herself, but everything was dull, stale, flat, and

unprofitable. The rebellion in her soul grew more and more violent. There were hours when she came to wish that she had resisted Sylvester and married Sir Richard. Anything would have been better than the life she had to lead now.

She heard occasionally from Miss Riddell, and had so been told of the terrible accident to Lucian Leigh, and of his almost fatal illness, but the same letter contained also better news, and since then she had heard that he was slowly recovering. She had been shocked and startled, but it was difficult to realize Lucian as otherwise than well and strong, and no details had been given to her.

Her natural good spirits often got the upper hand of her burden of discontent, and when all the house-party started for the meet at Mr. Jackson's place, Beechgrove, in a bright sparkling morning under brown trees and blue sky, amid golden and tawny ferns and ruddy hedgerows, she enjoyed herself as if she had never known a care. The red coats, the dogs, and the horses, the noise and the bustle of a hunting morning were delightful to her, and she had never looked more blooming and full of life than when she went into the house at Beechgrove to breakfast, followed by Una. Mrs. Jackson received the two handsome young strangers pleasantly, and called to her son to come and wait on them and take care of them.

"As you have nothing else to do, Wilfred," she said smiling.

Young Mr. Jackson was pale and very lame, and it was explained that he was only just getting over a bad accident which had invalided him for some time.

"Stopped all my fun in the Rocky Mountains, Miss Haredale," he said, "where I had gone on the jolliest trip, and I mustn't ride all this winter. Hard lines, isn't it?"

"Very hard," said Amethyst, feeling that the accident in the Rocky Mountains was not quite new to her, though she could not recall how she had heard of it.

"Have you heard of poor Leigh lately, Jackson?" said another young man across the table.

"Oh, yes," said Wilfred Jackson, with sudden gravity. "Riddell, his friend, who has been with him, you know, wrote to me yesterday. He is better, and able to walk a little, and they have got away from Edinburgh and down to Bournemouth. I believe he is to go abroad for the winter. It has been a frightful business."

"Were you with Mr. Leigh in the Rocky Mountains? He is a neighbour of ours at Cleverley," said Amethyst.

"Ah, you know him? Yes, and I spoiled his trip by getting my back hurt. He gave it up to look after me. Never was such a good fellow. I can't take in the idea of his being helpless and ill himself."

"But you are having better accounts of him. I never heard exactly how he was hurt?"

"Nor I, in detail. He fell over the cliffs in the Orkneys. There was some internal strain which has caused frightful suffering, and besides, one of the ribs, which were broken, pierced the lungs so that he cannot breathe, or speak, without pain. They brought him back to Edinburgh in his yacht, where his mother met him. He is wonderfully patient and plucky, Riddell says—that he was sure to be. They are very anxious, but I can't help

hoping and thinking—don't you, Miss Haredale?—that any fellow so young and strong *must* get over it. I was very bad last summer, and I shall soon be right again now."

There was a warm-hearted simplicity in the young man's manner, as he spoke of his friend, that was very engaging; but his last words tightened Amethyst's breath, and made her fingers cold. Not get over it! Lucian! She had never dreamed of such a possibility. Una struck into the conversation, and asked a few more questions, eliciting a good deal of information as to the accident in America, and as to Lucian's present condition. To Wilfred Jackson he was evidently a hero.

"I hope to be quite strong by Christmas," he said, "and no trouble to anybody. Then I shall go out and see him. Riddell is going back to Oxford, he seems anxious at leaving Mrs. Leigh alone. But my father's on the move, Miss Haredale; will you come out?"

As Amethyst stood on the steps at the front door, and looked out again on the gay scene of active, vigorous life, she recalled how Lucian had once planned taking his bride to such a meeting in his own county, and had discoursed on the perfect horse he would get for her, and directed her taste as to the kind of habit in which he thought it correct for a lady to ride. She had always pictured him in some sort of active exertion. When she thought of him lying prostrate, the contrast, and the pity of it, gave her a new sense of the sadness and the mystery of life. There was no time, however, for sad thoughts. She and Una were asked to go in a large brake with Wilfred Jackson and one of his sisters and some other

girls who were not mounted. The meet was as much for show as for business, and there was time to drive about the beautiful park and to chatter pleasantly over the little incidents of the occasion.

Miss Jackson was an engaging girl, and Amethyst and Una felt that they were in another and a wholesomer world than that in which they lived at Restharrow. Presently it appeared that, as everything possible must be done to amuse Wilfred Jackson while he was lame, and deprived of his usual resources, some *tableaux vivants* and charades were in prospect, and it was soon hinted that if the Miss Haredales would come and help in getting them up, it would be too delightful.

Amethyst, of course, referred the matter to Mrs. Lorrimore, a good-natured woman, who was only too glad that her young guests should enjoy themselves, and the result was a great deal of going backwards and forwards, and once, a visit of two or three days to Beechgrove.

The Jacksons were a large family, prosperous, merry, and affectionate. Una, at any rate, had never known people of the same kind before, nor had she ever been so gay and so like other girls in her life. The acquaintance gave her that fresh start which is often so good and wholesome. She struck up a friendship with the girl nearest her own age, and forgot her sins and her sorrows in the natural, genial companionship. She became on intimate terms with Wilfred, and in his company learned to laugh because she was gay, and not because she was scornful.

The acquaintance with the Leighs was of recent date, and Lucian's past history was evidently unknown. He was a great hero to Wilfred's

sisters, and when a cheerful account of him arrived from Mrs. Leigh to her son's friend, they all rejoiced as if he had been their brother.

Amethyst and Una had one point in common with their mother; they were quite capable of keeping their own counsel when they thought it desirable.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTEREST IN LIFE.

WHEN the tableaux at Beechgrove were over, and the girls came back to Restharrow, Amethyst felt as if she had had enough of the Jacksons for the present. She gave herself no airs, but, fresh and unworn as were her impulses for work or study, the beauty of the season had learned to expect more from society than very amateurish acting, and boy and girl dancing and flirting of the simplest kind. She was not vain enough to enjoy indiscriminate admiration, and indeed, took it as a matter of course. She found a letter from her mother, summoning herself and Una to join her in a few days' time, to start immediately for the south of France. Lady Haredale was delighted to think that her dear girls had been having a good time. Mrs. Lorrimore was the kindest of women. If Amethyst had not quite enough money for the journey to London, she had better ask her hostess to advance it. Lady Haredale was in a hurry to catch the post.

Amethyst tossed the letter into a drawer, and gave a vicious stamp with the white slippers which she had just put on, and then ran hastily down-

stairs to dinner. The hall at Restharrow was the gathering-place of the company, and as Amethyst came down the stairs dressed all in white, she saw, among the guests gathered picturesquely round the fire, the slight alert figure and peculiar face of Oliver Carisbrooke. He came right up to the foot of the staircase to meet her, and greeted her with marked and eager interest.

"I am not disappointed; you are here still?" he said. "Oh, but it is good to see you."

Amethyst hardly knew how to answer. He claimed her and appropriated her, standing by her side until he was told to take her in to dinner, and then setting himself at once to talk to her in tones meant for her ear only.

"So you are here," he said; "and is it well? Have you regrets?"

"Not for London," said Amethyst, surprised at his manner.

"No," he said, "you were not born to live in a gilded cage. You couldn't have endured it long. Oh, do you know how I watched you? I did not mean to let you marry Grattan. I would have stopped you—before it was too late."

"I don't see how you could have anything to do with it, Mr. Carisbrooke."

"You are angry? I am making you angry on purpose. Every word I say to you is for an end of my own. Then there was your boy lover. I was afraid of him till I saw him with you. Then I had no fears at all. But I couldn't stand the thought that you might be still bound in heart to a fellow who had had scruples about you, who cared one iota to know what you had *done*—when he knew *you*. Then there was the young poet. Of course he was in love with you, but there wasn't stuff enough in dream-love for you. I weighed

them all in the balance. For you see, *I* know you."

"Hardly well enough to say so much," said Amethyst; but he struck in—

"Ah, wait, you will not be angry with me soon. But it's time all that was over. Now we have met again, mayn't we have one of our old discussions about the value of life, and the good things of life? What is the next thing for you now? Are you going to learn Greek, or hospital nursing, or what?"

"I shall learn Greek," said Amethyst. "I mean to use my brains."

"And when the Greek is learnt?"

"Then I'll teach it."

He smiled, and suddenly changing the conversation entirely, began to talk about a new play.

Amethyst felt a little angry with him, but she was no longer dull, and she wondered much what he would do next.

Restharrow was a house where every one did as they liked, and, in the evening, the large party scattered about among the different rooms. Mr. Carisbrooke came up to Amethyst, and said, "Come with me;" and, quite careless as to whether they were noticed or not, he led the way into a little morning-room and shut the door.

Amethyst felt bewildered. The room was full of firelight and red-shaded lamplight, and Oliver Carisbrooke stood in the warm glow with his deep-set, peculiar eyes fixed full upon her.

"Amethyst," he said, "commonplace and conventional doings are not for you. I am playing a bold game, and I think—I think—I shall win it. I'm not going to pretend that I am what you call a good man, there are plenty to tell you the contrary; but I am going to tell you that, after all

I have known and done, I love you passionately. Even you cannot give me a first love. What do I care? You shall love me now. I defy any one to say that I have let trifles stop me when my heart is set on a purpose. Are you thinking of your half-sister? She was too weak a creature to venture anything for my sake. But after I saw *you*, I said, Here is my fate. So I managed for my niece to join you, and I set to work on a plan. I caught your attention with talk that surprised you. No other man ever dreamed of such love for you. I soon saw that there was no chance, but by one bold stroke to tell you so. You can understand me. You know that we can give each other *life*."

"I—I don't think I am in love with you," stammered Amethyst in a broken, childish voice, and with eyes fixed, as if fascinated, on his face.

"No, darling, but you shall be. Besides, you have not yet heard what I ask of you. I don't imagine that your father would let you marry me now. I tell you plainly, I cannot marry—in a short time I shall have the means to do so. You know I have been abroad settling my affairs, and when I got back I was resolved that I would not wait a moment before letting you know that all there is of me is yours. Others may shrink from your father and brother's reputation. I care for it so little that I am not afraid to allude to it in your presence. Tell me that I don't love you in vain, tell me— Ah, you think I am mad, that I am too bold. Is that possible?"

"I cannot—answer—in a minute," said Amethyst. "I never thought you were more than a friend."

"But I was a friend?" he said, taking her hand and coming closer. "And I want to teach you what a friend can be. You need not promise, there

is nothing to tell the world about at present. But we will be friends; we understand each other, we can talk and write—as friends. You can throw me over if you like, by and by. But I have laid my heart open to you, and I think—I think you have felt that the world is a dull place with no love in it."

"Oh, it is!" burst from Amethyst's lips. "My life is very dreary."

"*Your* life dreary. Never any more, my darling; we will make each other's happiness now."

"Amethyst!"

The door was pushed open, and Una came quickly into the room. She went right up to her sister, and stood by her side.

"I had lost you," she said anxiously.

Amethyst caught hold of her hand, while Mr. Carisbrooke turned upon her with a sort of fury.

"Your sister is with *me*," he said.

"Mr. Carisbrooke," said Amethyst, "I cannot say a word now. You cannot take me prisoner all in a minute;" and, still holding Una's hand, she darted back to the protection of the rest of the company.

"He is a bad man, Amethyst," said Una passionately, when they were up-stairs alone. "He led Blanche, heaven knows where; and he sacrificed Carrie to Charles to get near to you. And you *know* the tales we heard of him were true."

"Yes, he says so," said Amethyst.

"You don't love him? You don't want to marry him? You have never thought of him all this time?"

But Amethyst tossed about all night in restless excitement. Love, in a complex nature, is a complex thing, and though she was not quite in love with Oliver Carisbrooke, he had truly said that he could teach her to be so. She was fascinated by him, and, when she remembered how nearly she

had sacrificed her life to worldly ambition, it is impossible to exaggerate the attraction which this heat of daring passion, this indifference to consequences, had for her.

Once again a strong appeal had been made to her to change her course of life. Sylvester had appealed to her sense of right, in utter self-forgetfulness, and had won the day. He had given her conscience strength. She heard his voice now—"I would rather see you die than do it."

This man appealed to sensation, emotion, passion, to every force within her that makes life or mars it, to that intensifying of the feelings which she had hoped Lucian might bring back to her, and which the sight of him had left cold and dead. But did she respond to the appeal? What was the feeling that drew her to him, that made her long to grant at least "the friendship" he asked for?

Suddenly back into her mind there came a day at Cleverley, and a speech of her mother's, the full meaning of which she did not then understand. Lady Haredale was reading a letter from Tony.

"You know, darling," she had said in her sweet voice, "he is devoted to me, poor fellow; and it does give an interest in life to feel one's self so necessary. It's quite a woman's vocation."

"It's the same thing," cried Amethyst to herself, starting up in bed. "*I* want an interest in life! *I* am like *her!*" and she shuddered from head to foot. Poor child, who feared to be like her mother!

Her clear brain came to her aid once more. It was no true love with which Oliver Carisbrooke inspired her. She wanted an interest in life, and it was in her nature to find it as her mother—and her sister—had done before her. She was clever

enough to know it, noble enough to despise herself for it; but she was Lady Haredale's daughter, and she felt it. Would she have strength to resist it?

"Well," she thought, "I *had* better die than do it."

When Una came in the next morning, full of misgivings, Amethyst was up and dressed, and held a note in her hand. The window was flung open, and the fresh cold air was blowing in. She was pale, as if she had cried all night. She showed Una the note.

"No—*never*.

"AMETHYST HAREDALE."

"Now, give that to the servant for him," she said, "and never, never speak to me about it again. I fight awfully hard. Some day I shall be beaten."

Amethyst had no rejoicing sense of freedom in escaping from this second snare. The straight path was cold and dull, and there were pitfalls on either side. To avoid being like Lady Haredale was not quite what Mr. Riddell had meant by a "great inspiration." She did not feel in the least the better for the victory she had won.

She sat down and put up her hands over her tired eyes, on which Oliver Carisbrooke's passionate face had seemed to print itself. She was too tired to think; but his words echoed in her ears—

"The young poet's was only a dream-love, not substantial enough for you."

Amethyst dropped her hands and started up.

"Oh, I am sick of lovers," she said angrily. "None of them are any good."

The sun broke out through the mist of the autumn morning, the bells from the church in the village rang a merry chime through the open window. Amethyst turned her back on the smiling prospect. The morning bells had no message of hope for her.

CHAPTER V.

TWISTING THE THREADS OF FATE.

THE weeks that followed Lucian's accident had been a time of severe trial to Sylvester Riddell. All the responsibility rested on his shoulders of deciding whether they should go ashore at Kirkwall, or get on to Edinburgh in the yacht, on which latter course Sylvester, finding that the Kirkwall doctor authorized it, and could accompany them, had finally fixed. He had to telegraph to Mrs. Leigh, who was still in Switzerland, to come to Edinburgh, and when he did so he had scarcely any hope that she would find her son alive. He knew nothing of illness, was not a person of ready practical resource, and was far too sensitive not to feel the sight of such suffering to be a terrible strain upon him. Imaginative and sympathetic, he felt all the horror of the sudden striking down of the strong young life, and to be calm and cheerful was almost beyond his power. Lucian was far too ill to fret about himself or his future; when he was conscious, relief from pain was all he could desire, and the first time he showed much sense of the situation was when he knew Mrs. Leigh was coming.

"Oh, Syl!—the mother!" he said, looking up with wistful eyes, "try to help her."

There was very little help or comfort to be given. Sylvester knew that the worth of life would be as much crushed out for Mrs. Leigh by Lucian's death, or hopeless illness, as for the poor young fellow himself. She was a good woman, and a brave one, but heavy trial was new to her, and her misery took the line of trying every expedient, getting every opinion, wondering constantly whether anything else could have been done at first, and perhaps, spite of herself, her state of mind became apparent to Lucian, for he tried to say something of "Syl being so clever, and always knowing what to do,"—an opinion perhaps hardly shared by the trained nurses, but which went to Syl's heart. Mrs. Leigh, however, to say nothing of Lucian, would have been so much more forlorn without him, that he could not possibly leave them alone; he remained with them in Edinburgh, and, when his old playfellow's vigorous youth enabled him to rally up to a certain point, he arranged for the difficult journey south, and escorted them back to London. Here he was obliged to leave them, to return to his duties at Oxford, taking a few days' much-needed rest at home by the way.

He had had no time to think of himself, though there was much in his life which required consideration; he felt how severe the strain upon him had been, when he found himself once more in the dear old home, with his father's loving eyes scanning his face, and noting the traces on it of anxiety and fatigue.

There was Amethyst and his chance of winning her. She had never been out of his thoughts, but it went against every generous instinct to seek her

the moment that he left her old lover's side, when poor Lucian's long heart-ache had been betrayed in every unconscious murmur of the beloved name. The unselfish good wishes which had been meant to set him free from all such scruples only intensified them. And yet he had said too much to say no more, and, without his father's concurrence, he was hardly in a position to say anything.

He murmured an inquiry as to where she was, and if his aunt ever heard from her, and soon had told his father all there was to tell.

Mr. Riddell sighed, and shook his head. He had guessed it all before, and he did not quite see his way through it.

"My dear boy," he said, "whatever I can do to forward your happiness you may regard as done. What else can I wish for? But, if you'll take advice, give her a little time. She isn't thinking of you just now, Syl. She needs to be left a little to herself, to find herself out. She knows how you have been occupied, and I am sure she is ready for no sudden definite appeal from you, which is all that is at present in your power. We will not lose sight of her for you."

Sylvester acquiesced, yet utter silence was impossible to him. He could ask nothing from her just then, but he must let her know that he continued to give her all himself. He wrote some verses, veiled under the familiar disguise of Amelot to Iris, and sent them, unsigned and undated, to the address which he soon caused his aunt to give him. But it was a little like posting them to the rainbow's end.

If he could not woo her, he might make himself worthy of her. When he went back to Oxford, he took up his work there with the determination to make it more real. He would in no way stand

aside from the struggle of life to which he had urged her. The outward changes in his life were slight, but, nevertheless, it was pervaded by a new and more earnest spirit. The lads who had come to his help in his extremity were no longer strangers to him, and men began to say that Riddell would gain influence in the place.

Mrs. Leigh had written encouraging accounts of Lucian. The London doctors had recommended the winter abroad as the best cure for the injured lungs, and had not forbidden a hope that the serious internal injuries resulting from the strain might be surmounted by Lucian's hitherto unbroken health and strength. At least, so the mother interpreted their verdict, and it was decided that they were to go by sea to the Mediterranean, and finally to settle at Bordighera, a place Mrs. Leigh knew and liked, and where she hoped Sylvester would join them at Christmas, and find his friend much nearer recovery than when they parted.

Sylvester hoped that so it might be, and made all necessary arrangements for spending part of his winter vacation abroad, all the more willingly, because he knew that the Haredales were somewhere among the towns of the Riviera. So it came to pass that one day, just after Christmas, Lucian lay on a couch under the verandah of one of the prettiest villas of Bordighera, wrapped up and propped with pillows, and listened, with a half-smile, to his mother's assurances to the newly-arrived Sylvester, of how much good the climate was doing him, and how much better he was than he had been in London.

"Let Syl stay and talk to me, mother," he said, "and you go and get your drive; he'll take care of me. Perhaps we'll go by and by for a drive

in the pony carriage. Then I can show him the place."

"Very well," said Mrs. Leigh, "that will be very nice for you. But it is good for him to walk a little too, Sylvester. He has been longing for you to come, to show you how much better he can do so."

There were anxious lines on her smooth handsome face, which contradicted her cheerful words, as she went away after a little bustle of arrangements, and left the two young men alone together.

"Well, dear boy," said Sylvester, turning to his friend, "and how is it? Do you like this lovely place?"

"Yes," said Lucian, "the soft air is comfortable, and I can talk better than in the autumn, I have more breath."

Sylvester felt as if he had never realized before what the change had been, as he listened to the gentle languid voice, and noticed how the handsome face had lost all its sturdy impassiveness, and had fined away into a sort of ethereal beauty, while nobody could accuse the clear grey eyes now of want of expression. Sylvester hardly knew how to meet their gaze, but it prepared him for the next words.

"You won't mind my talking to you, Syl. You know I'm not really any better."

"No?" said Sylvester, with difficulty.

"No. You see I was so strong and healthy, I took a great deal of killing. But I dare say the doctors always told you that there was fatal mischief done by the strain, and there's not a bit inside me but what's all wrong. I had to know the probabilities before I left England, you see, to get my affairs settled."

"It is hard to believe," said Sylvester.

"Yes, I suppose I should mind more: but I'm so tired out with pain that any sort of rest seems welcome."

Lucian was as straightforward and to the point as ever, and, as his friend did not at once answer, he said—

"I thought you knew it—and it's a comfort to speak out. You see how the mother takes it, and poor old Jackson (he's out here with two of his sisters, you know), he thinks he ought to cheer me up."

"Dear Lucy," said Sylvester, "talk just as you like, and when you like; I'm too glad to help you."

"Could you make the mother understand by degrees? It's very bad for her. You see James Leigh is only a distant cousin, and he must have Toppings. She thought so much of my living here, I wish she'd *give me up*."

"I'll try," said Sylvester; "but she will come to it in her own time."

"Your father could help her. Syl, do you think he could come out here by and by? He would make it much easier for my mother, and I should like to do all that's right, and prepare myself as much as possible."

"I am sure he will come, if you wish it."

"And then—Amethyst. The Jacksons know her and Una, they met them in the autumn. But I shall never see her again. Wasn't it odd that we talked of her that last day in Orkney? Ask her to forgive me for being such a fool. Give her my love. I wish I could have taken care of her. I wish I could know she was happy."

"I will tell her everything. Don't talk too much now, dear boy, there'll be plenty of chances."

"I don't know. You see, sometimes, speaking

hurts me so badly; but I've thought it all over, in and out. You know, Syl, if I'd been in the army, and got killed out in Egypt or anywhere, you would have thought nothing of it, though I am young. And we're bound to believe that it's all right, and God's will, as it is."

"Lucy," said Sylvester, "there's one thing you must let *me* say. I know you gave your life for mine, quite as much as if we'd been under fire, and you had waited to help me out."

"Oh no, I didn't," said Lucian. "I let go because I thought there was no good in killing two people instead of one. I was done for before that. What! the pony carriage come round? Let me rest for five minutes, Syl, and then we'll go."

Lucian was helped into the pony carriage, and Sylvester sat beside him, and drove along a lovely sunny road with a wide view of the blue sparkling sea. They did not talk much more, only Lucian made his companion notice each point of interest, and very observant eyes he had for bird or flower, picturesque costume, or strangely-shaped boat dancing on the water—the traveller's keen eyes for the characteristics of a new country.

Suddenly the keen eyes fixed themselves, and he started half upright, and laid a detaining hand on the reins.

"There she is!" he said, breathlessly.

Sylvester saw a tall young lady, in a grey dress, coming along the road towards them; but his sight was shorter than Lucian's, and only a lover's instant insight made him say—"Amethyst? Impossible!"

"No—they are somewhere in these parts. Stop, Syl! She is coming."

Sylvester pulled up short, sprang out, and went to meet her.

"Miss Haredale," he said, desperately, "Lucian is here. He has seen you; will you come and speak to him?"

"Here!" ejaculated Amethyst. "Oh yes—if he wishes it. I hope he is better?"

She came up to the side of the carriage, and Lucian raised himself, and looked up in her face.

Alas, she needed no answer to her question; her colour fled, her eyes brimmed with tears, nothing that she had heard had prepared her for the truth.

"We have been enjoying our drive," said Sylvester nervously, "but I must not let him stay out till it gets chilly. Have you been here long, Miss Haredale?"

"Only since yesterday. We are at Hôtel——" She faltered; and Lucian said, with something of his old abruptness,

"Never mind me. I am sorry I look so bad, it frightens you. But people soon get used to it."

"I was taken by surprise," said Amethyst, with a great struggle for composure. "I hope you will soon look better."

"My mother will call on Lady Haredale," said Lucian punctiliously, but with wistful eyes.

Amethyst gave him her hand, as Sylvester made a decided movement, but, as he held it close for a moment, the contrast with the well-remembered grasp of his strong brown fingers broke her down completely, and she hurried away, half-blinded with tears. Lucian did not speak another word till the drive was over and he was back again on his couch. Then he whispered—

"Syl!"

"Yes—what is it?"

"Won't she come sometimes and let me see her? Tell her how it is with me. I should like it, so much. Just to look at her!"

"I will tell her, and I am sure she will come. Rest now, and I will go and find her," said Sylvester, gently.

"Yes, that's what I want. Tell her how the Jackson girls come to tea, and many people. And the mother will call. But *you* tell her the truth."

"Yes."

"Just a few times more," said Lucian, as he watched his messenger go.

Sylvester went with hurried steps, urged as much by his own feelings as by Lucian's words. He made his way down into the sunny road where he had left Amethyst, and soon overtook her walking fast along it, with little heed to the beauty of sea or sky.

"I am grieved to have given you such a shock," he said, "but I was obliged to think first of him."

"Oh, I knew he was ill, but he looks as if he was dying!" broke out Amethyst, with a husky voice.

"Yes," said Sylvester, "that is the sad truth. Life is all over for him, he cannot recover. He wishes you to know it. But, if you will, come sometimes to Casa Remi, as others do, and let him see you. It will give him pleasure. Mrs. Leigh thinks society good for him. If he could see the old friendliness restored, he would not fret so much over his past want of insight."

"I thought that he believed himself to have been perfectly right."

"Ah, he has learned many lessons—in a hard school, poor boy! But you will give him this great pleasure—for a little while?"

"If Mrs. Leigh wishes—it is for her to decide," said Amethyst, still a little stiffly; then with a sudden break down—"Oh, how he is altered!"

"Yes, indeed."

Sylvester was pale, he turned his troubled eyes upon her.

"It is impossible, just now," he said, "to think of ourselves—of oneself I mean, of anything but of him."

"I will do just what *you* think is best for him," said Amethyst. "Tell him I will come. You understand?" She put her hand into Sylvester's, and he held it in his own.

"I understand," he said.

Their eyes met as they parted. She looked very unhappy; but Sylvester's heart bounded as he felt that once again she yielded to his influence, and she forgot that she had ever dreaded meeting him again, and had been half angry when his verses reached her.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL THESE THINGS HAVE CEASED TO BE WITH MY DESIRE OF LIFE.

MRS. LEIGH obeyed her son's wish, and made the *amende* with all the gracious tact that could possibly be shown in dealing with so difficult a situation. It suited Lady Haredale much better to ignore the past than to keep up any kind of coldness. The Jacksons were a connecting link, with their eager seeking of Amethyst and Una; Lucian's two young sisters were glad to resume friendly relations with Kattern and Tory, who had but newly joined their mother, with Miss Haredale and Carrie Carisbrooke.

It was a fortunate moment. Lord Haredale was away at Monte Carlo, and his wife, who, with what Una called "my lady's dreadful capacity for enjoying herself," had found friends of every sort on their travels, lost in some marvellous way the nameless look, shabby, "shady" (only some slang word could quite describe it), which had just a little tarnished her graceful ladyhood, when there were only shabby, shady people with whom to associate, and fitted at once into her old circle. Other residents and visitors called upon her, so that a

time of cheerfulness and gaiety set in for all the young people, who met every day, and made expeditions together, which often began and ended in Mrs. Leigh's garden at Casa Remi. Amethyst came with the rest. If she had been deaf to Sylvester's appeal, she could hardly have resisted the half-acknowledged misery in Mrs. Leigh's face. She was kind and gentle to Lucian, and her manner never betrayed under-currents of feeling; but the dreary months of dissatisfaction with herself and with her lot in life had stolen away her bloom, and she looked unhappy and weary.

Lucian could not talk to her much. As he had said, he lay and looked at her; but how life and death seemed to him, when she was in his sight, it was hard to tell. Sylvester sometimes feared that the pleasure, which he had so much desired, had been dearly bought. Surely that restraint must be hard for Lucian, which was so great a strain upon himself, but the wonder how it was with her, the fear that all was not well with her, the pity for the dying lover, and the passion that beat in his own heart, were almost more than he could bear.

"Syl," said Lucian one day, after one of these gatherings, about three weeks after Amethyst's first visit, "Syl, Amethyst isn't happy."

"No," said Sylvester, a little startled, "I fear not; her life has many hardships."

"I want to speak to her alone," said Lucian, "our parting has always stung her. It's bad for her to look back on; I think I can make it better. You'll manage it, won't you?"

"If it's not too much for you, I will try."

"I've got it to do," said Lucian. "Get her to come by herself; I know what I want to say."

"Well," said Sylvester, "I'll try—when you are feeling strong enough."

"To-morrow then." He paused a moment and looked at Sylvester, and then said distinctly—"She is not the least bit in love with *me* now, you know, Syl."

"Oh, my dear boy," said Sylvester, hurriedly, "all this is very bad for you. Even for her sake, I can't bear to have you distress yourself. It is so hard for you."

"Why, Syl, I don't feel enough like living, to mind as much as you suppose. Of course sometimes"—he paused again, then smiled a little—"I know better than she does now, about a good many things.—Oh, I'm bad to-day! Lift me, Syl. A change makes it easier."

Sylvester did what he could to mitigate the attack of pain which followed, glad that Lucian did not try to hide it from him, as he too often did from his mother.

He did not see how to manage the interview without Mrs. Leigh's co-operation, and decided to tell her of Lucian's wish. She gave him a look which went to his heart; for in it was the acknowledgment of all which she could not bring her tongue to utter.

"I leave it to you," she said, "he must have his own way now."

Sylvester went straight to Amethyst and asked her to come at a given time, and to let Lucian say to her whatever he would. She looked at him for a moment, and he could see that she shrank from such a meeting, but she only said—

"I will come."

"Thank you," said Sylvester; "he has set his heart on it."

She looked, as she stood silent, as if with another

word her self-control would break down into passionate grief, but the moment passed, and she recovered her usual manner, as she repeated her promise to come to-morrow morning. Her troubled look dwelt in Sylvester's mind. Had the old love woke again in tender pity, and were they breaking her heart once more with this recall of the past? But this time Sylvester did not understand her, and tormented himself in vain.

She came on the next day, punctual to the moment, very grave and quiet, and perfectly calm.

Lucian had been resting all the morning, and now lay on his couch under the verandah, while Mrs. Leigh greeted Amethyst, and set a chair for her close by, within easy reach of his eyes and voice, then with hardly a word she left them.

"Amethyst," said Lucian, "you know I'm going to die, and you, I suppose, will have a long life. I want to take the pain out of your thoughts of me, so that when you think of those days when we were engaged to each other, it may be pleasant to you, as if we'd had a good time when we were children."

Amethyst looked at him, but she could not speak.

"I never ought to have lost patience with a girl like you, and I ought to have known you better. But I was too young and stupid, it was a dreadful thing to me when I knew I had wronged you—had been so wrong—and couldn't make up for it. And when I saw you again, I knew I had never thought enough of you, though I loved you so much."

"Oh, Lucian—no—"

"If we'd married, I suppose I should have learned in time. But I should have made mistakes

and vexed you, I wasn't fit to guide you. I should always have thought I knew best. Well, then, you see it has all been for the best, and I want to tell you, that if I hadn't had the loving, and the getting to understand you, and the trying to get on without you, it would have been much worse for me now. And so, as that poor little old time has helped me to die better, it seemed to me that perhaps the thought of it might make your life better for you—at least to know what you have done for me."

"Oh, Lucian, that's not quite it. Why was I such a wicked girl as to forget you? It wasn't because I was angry. If I had been faithful too—you might —we might—"

"No, dear," said Lucian. "That's what I want to show you. You couldn't—you wanted more than I had got to give you. That's what I found out. You'll have it some day, and then you won't feel I did you nothing but harm."

"Oh," said Amethyst, with streaming tears, "I shall always—I shall always feel—*glorified* by your having loved me—*so*."

He got hold of her hand, and held it gently in both his own, and when she was a little calmer, he said—

"Tell me about your troubles."

"They're not worth it," she said, "hard, sordid money troubles—things that are hateful. And the wrong things I do—and feel—and think."

"I think there'll be better times for you," said Lucian; then he smiled, and said, "As there will be soon for me."

"If—if you could but get better—"

Lucian gave her the strangest look.

"Oh, no," he said, quietly, and then, with a little more of his usual manner—

"I'm sorry to have made you cry. But I think you'll like by and by to know I quite understood. Now there's just one thing more."

He took hold of a gold locket that hung from his watch chain, and opened it slowly, then took out of it the broad gipsy ring, set with a big amethyst and two diamonds—the very ring that his boyish taste had thought both handsome and symbolical enough to give his betrothed.

"Let me give it you back," he said. "Perhaps you won't like to wear it now; but, when you put another ring on your finger, let this be a guard to it. That's my fancy."

"Oh, Lucian! Put it on—I never—never shall—"

"I think you will," he said. "I *hope* you will."

He took her warm young hand, and, with his weak fingers, put on the ring, and back upon them both came the joyous moment when he had first put it on, and "all the world was young."

"And then," continued Lucian, "when Mr. Riddell is here, and gives me my last Communion, will you come too? I remember the Sunday we were engaged—"

"Oh," said Amethyst, "all the love went away together. But now, I will—I will—"

"There is Syl, across the garden," said Lucian, after a moment.—"He thinks—I shall be tired. He takes such care of me, he is so good to me—now he must come and take you home. Good-bye, my dear love. God bless you! I am quite happy now."

He looked up at her, and with a sudden impulse she stooped down and kissed him, and then turning her head away, and waving Sylvester back, she fled across the garden and out of sight.

Lucian had covered his face with his hands, it was flushed and burning, as all that was left of life

in him surged up and rebelled against the approaching hand of death.

"In much pain, dear boy?" said Sylvester anxiously, after a minute.

"More—more than I knew," said Lucian, with panting breath, then, with a look which Sylvester never forgot, he whispered—"But it's quite right, —Syl."

By and by, when he was able to leave Lucian, Sylvester went out on to the hill-side under silvery olive woods, and over broken ground covered with rosemary and thyme. The sun was bright, and the sea pure, clear blue beneath it. He thought that he had come to seek solitude and silence; but, when he saw Amethyst coming towards him, he knew that he had been really in search of her.

She came up to him, and stood by his side, and they looked into each other's faces.

"It did not hurt him?" she said presently in a trembling voice.

"Oh, no, he will be more at rest now."

"Oh," said Amethyst, with a fresh burst of tears, "oh—I am so sorry—so sorry for him! Oh—I think I'd die, if he could get well and be happy."

They were passionate words; but her tone and look lifted the dread from Sylvester's heart. It was for Lucian, not for herself, that she was weeping.

"One cannot dare to wish, for such as he," he said.

"But I was so cruel to him, when he came back, in London. I hurt him more than I need. Oh, I have been a wicked girl, always trying to get something for myself, to make up for having been ill-treated! I despised every one. I despised him.

Oh, I've had a lump of ice instead of a heart, I hate myself for it!"

"But now the ice has melted?"

"Yes," said Amethyst, with childish directness, "I am sorry now."

They walked on slowly, side by side. Words were difficult; but a great peace came over them both.

"Do you think—" said Amethyst, presently, "is he worse? It will not be very soon, will it?"

"I don't know," said Sylvester. "He is much weaker than he was. I am glad my father is coming next week. Poor Lucy was meant for living! But he does suffer frightfully, night and day. I shall not leave him—I have arranged for that—and I couldn't possibly go away now."

"He likes to have you."

"Yes, the dear boy! He always has clung to me, though, heaven knows, I often manage badly enough for him. But whatever he likes—There's one thing I must tell you. You know I tried to hold him up when he fell. My strength was going—in another minute he must have pulled me over. And he knew it—and let my hand go!"

Sylvester could hardly speak of that most awful moment, and Amethyst grew paler with sympathy. "Oh—that was splendid of him!" she said.

Then her heart gave a great throb and bound, and she knew which life was the dearest to her. The blood rushed back to her temples, she could see nothing, but she felt that Sylvester held her hand close in his own, and presently she heard his voice whispering—

"You know what makes my life worth living?"

She turned, and at once giving him her hands, and putting him away from her, she said—

"Oh, we will do everything for him, we will not think of anything but him—while he wants us."

She fled away as she spoke; but her words seemed to Sylvester the most beautiful answer that she could have given him, the perfect expression of their according hearts.

In his pocket-book was still preserved the young primrose springing from dead leaves, with which, long ago, Amethyst had illustrated her saying that "beginnings come out of endings."

It was no inapt type of the sweet hopes springing up in these days of mourning—hopes all the sweeter for the generous reverence with which they waited for fulfilment.

CHAPTER VII.

THE POWER OF THE PAST.

WHILE all the bitterness of past wrongs was thus, for Amethyst, softening into a tender haze of memory, it became apparent to Una that a new future was offered to herself.

The pleasant, wholesome intercourse that had begun for her at Restharrow, had made the days cheerful at Bordighera, and, together with health much improved by the southern climate, had brought her for the first time something of the natural gaiety of her eighteen years. She very soon knew quite well, that her presence made the pleasure for Wilfred Jackson, that he sought her at every possible moment, and offered her the natural and innocent courtship of a warm-hearted youth, which ought to have been the opening of all the joys and rights of her young womanhood.

But behind her lay, not the "duties enough and little cares" of unawakened childhood, not the playful preferences of attractive girlhood, but the searing, burning memory of premature passion.

She let the pleasant thing go on, she hesitated and doubted, for she liked Wilfred Jackson very much, and she liked—she always would like—

intercourse that was touched with possibilities of emotion. And she would have been so glad to forget all her miserable past, to go on into a happy future.

She knew that she was watched by Tory and Kattern, and she did not put them off the scent; she knew that Amethyst was only blind because her thoughts were absorbed by Lucian's condition; she knew how welcome her engagement would be to every one belonging to her. But day by day her heart grew heavier within her, and she dreaded more and more the moment of decision.

It came one day, among the olive trees, over a bed of violets, with the blue sea behind them, and the white peaks before, a sweet sense of spring-time in the air, and everything befitting the spring of fresh young hope.

He was alone with her, and his tongue was loosed, and all his honest love and his eager longings were laid at her feet, and the prospect of a good and happy life was offered to her, all the blessings the value of which she had learned to know full well.

And her heart turned from it utterly, she shrank from his hand and his kiss. She had had her day —a day almost before the dawn—and she thought that she could never give herself to any man again.

She refused him, with a rain of tears and a passion of self-reproach, knowing that she had allowed him to expect another answer. Her words were so wild, and her manner so strange, that Wilfred, as he stood, pale and bitterly disappointed, felt as if he had wooed a mermaid, some incomprehensible, uncanny creature of a different race from his own. But he was stunned.

"Una," he said, "I think you gave me a right to expect another answer. You have given me a

bitter blow. I shall go away where I cannot see your face—your cruel face. But I don't give you up. I shall try again!"

Una fled away from him, and rushed home, where she threw herself into Amethyst's arms, and sobbed out all her self-reproach and her self-despair.

"Oh, my dear, I should have looked after you better!" said Amethyst regretfully. "But are you sure? Can't you ask him to give you a little time?"

"Oh, Amethyst, I like him, I hoped it would come to me, till yesterday, when we were picking flowers, he kissed my hand, and then—then all last night I dreamt of *other* kisses, oh, I felt them—I can feel them now. I've none left!"

"Dear Una, the past is not meant to spoil our future—there is forgiveness and peace—"

"For you—for you—You look back on a paradise, and I on—"

"Oh, Una—but it's all over, you have all your life left!"

"I have—I have!" cried Una, lifting her face from Amethyst's shoulder, "I would not have that past again, not the maddest moment of it! I will live—I will be good for something in spite of it. Oh—I should like to give my life to telling girls that one *can* be different. I think I'd *die* to keep another child from my fate! But it has been—and alas and alas, it will be!"

This was the wrong that Tony had done her.

She had saved her soul alive, but the first spring of her heart was gone for ever, and if a second came, it might not be till the chances of life were over for her.

She threw herself on her knees when Amethyst left her.

"Oh, God!" she whispered, "let me not look back—let me look forward up, up to Thee!"

There was a great outcry, when Wilfred stirred up his sisters to go back with him on the next day to Nice. The girls were angry, and declared that Una was a heartless flirt and had led him on; but Wilfred would not hear a reproach cast at her, and went up to the Leighs' villa to bid Lucian farewell, and to tell his story.

It was a bad day with Lucian, indeed each day began to show failing strength, and the shadow lay so heavily on all around him, that it was no wonder that Wilfred Jackson's affairs had never been guessed at. Lucian could not talk to him, but lay and listened while Sylvester put in occasional questions, and shortened the interview as much as possible. Then it came over Wilfred, that he was bidding his friend farewell for the last time, and he felt how much he had let himself be diverted from his state by a new interest. He muttered something, he hardly knew what, as he squeezed Lucian's hand, but it ended in "never forgetting the Rockies."

"All right," said Lucian, "and don't forget either that—I said—that I hoped, when you're dying, you may thank God for your love, as I do—though we've neither of us been lucky."

Wilfred was utterly overcome, and could only hurry away with another hand-squeeze. Lucian felt that the first of the final partings had come for him, and his breath came a little quickly.

"You'll stay with me, Syl, won't you?" he whispered.

"Why yes, of course, dear boy, that's all settled, long ago. Now let me read you to sleep. Then, if Amethyst comes by and by, you will be able to see her."

Amethyst was the bright spot in the sorrowful household. She was loving to Mrs. Leigh, listening to her sorrow, and trying to give her all the care which after so long a strain she was beginning to need, and cheering the poor young girls as they grew too sorrowful to care for their usual amusements, while in her ways with Lucian she showed the most absolutely simple and unaffected tenderness, thinking of nothing but how to give him pleasure. That the pleasure was sometimes not easily known from pain, Lucian hid from all eyes but Sylvester's keen ones, and, as he grew weaker, the inevitable longings mercifully sank away, or were bravely offered up with all the other sufferings of his failing life, and he took the joy as simply as it was given.

Lady Haredale, as usual, had adapted herself to circumstances. She took the greatest interest in "dear Lucian," never grudged Amethyst's intercourse with him, and, as she took occasion to tell Sylvester, "felt that the past was entirely blotted out."

"She may," Lucian had said bluntly, when this speech was reported to him, "but, as far as she is concerned, I don't, and I never shall."

Sylvester entirely concurred in this sentiment. If he detested any one on earth it was "my lady." If she had ever found out that Una had refused Wilfred Jackson, she might have found it hard to forgive her, for money grew scarcer and scarcer, and while she smiled, and talked, and found little satisfactions in the amusements of hotel life, she did not know in the least what was to become of them all.

What Lord Haredale did, with their scanty means, it was easy to guess, and, though his wife

could trust to some happy-go-lucky solution, l.as sister's face grew more anxious every day.

Her greatest comfort was Carrie Carisbrooke, who transferred the incipient affection she had felt for Charles to all his family. She told Miss Haredale, that she hoped they would continue to live together either at Silverfold or at Cleverley, and she fully intended to put it in her chaperon's power to give Tory the education she so much desired.

It was an undeserved return for the worldliness which had done her so great a disservice in trying to prop up a falling family with her fortune; but nevertheless, it made home and happiness for a very lonely girl, and so was its own reward.

Carrie's twenty-first birthday was imminent, and on the day of the Jacksons' departure, she received a letter from her uncle, saying that he meant to spend it with her, and to give up his stewardship of her fortune.

Una heard with a start of horror, "That Amethyst should meet that man again!"

"You need have no fear," said Amethyst. "If he comes, and people guess he ever had anything to do with me, it is no more than I deserve. He nearly ruined my life for me, but it was my own fault. Lucian will never know, and—"

She did not finish her sentence, but she knew that, some day, she would tell Sylvester how his trust in her had helped to save her from a second shipwreck. She would tell him, and he would understand.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF THE DEEP.

"No, Annabel—no, Amethyst, I shall not go. I am quite sure Charles has not deserved any attention from me. Read the telegram—'Come at once, Charles dying; his own fault. Bring money.' My lord is the most unpractical person I ever knew! He knows I have no money. What could I do for Charles over at Monte Carlo? Some horrid scandal, no doubt."

"It would be a far greater scandal to neglect him when he is dying, Lady Haredale. At least, I will go and help my poor brother."

"You, my dear Anna! Oh, that would be the very thing. You are always goodness itself, and full of kind thoughts. Do go; but as for the money——"

"There needn't be any trouble about that, Lady Haredale," said Carrie, who was in the room, "for I have plenty of money—quite handy, and Miss Haredale can take it with her to Monte Carlo."

"Why, my dear Carrie, you are quite a little guardian angel. Now it is all nicely settled, and I dare say you'll find my lord has got nervous about some mere trifle."

The Haredale party were all assembled in Lady Haredale's bedroom, which formed a sort of family gathering place. Tory had rushed in with a telegram in her hand, and this was the end of a hot discussion.

"Then—the train, oh, when is it?" said Miss Haredale, "and—oh yes, telegraph to my brother to meet me—for I should not know——"

"I shall go with you," said Amethyst, "there is nothing else to be thought of. There will be a great deal more than you could manage alone, Aunt Anna."

"Oh, but, Amethyst, you are the last person to be seen in such a place—on such an occasion."

"When my brother is dying," said Amethyst, "I don't think it can be wrong to go anywhere. If I don't like it, I'll come back again. There's a train in an hour, we can catch that."

Una ran after her as she went to get ready.

"Oh, Amethyst," she said, "I am afraid it will be very dreadful."

"So am I," said Amethyst. "But what would become of Carrie's money if auntie were there alone? And I have never been kind to poor Charles, nor had any mercy for him. I *must* go, Una. Only try to keep it all from Lucian; he will hurt himself with worrying about me."

"If Sylvester Riddell could go with you!"

"Oh no. Then Lucian would hear about it. Besides—oh no, Una, no one ought to come."

"Give my love to Charles," said Una, kissing her. "Oh dear, what is to become of us all?"

"I don't know," said Amethyst; "I've got to catch the train first."

The train was caught, and off they set, with poor Carrie's little roll of gold pieces carefully secreted in Amethyst's dress. She was sick with

fear of what she might find. To see evil which has been only heard of is a frightful thing, and she squeezed Lucian's ring through her glove, as if it gave her a sense of guardianship.

No Lord Haredale appeared at the station, which seemed ominous and depressing. They took a carriage, and with some difficulty found the *Bella Italia*, the hotel from which his telegram had been dated, the driver declining to believe that the ladies *could* want to go there.

It was a second-rate little place, with noisy voices coming from the open windows of the coffee-room, and from the restaurant in the garden outside.

The two ladies got out of their carriage and walked in, and Amethyst in careful broken Italian asked for Lord Haredale, and for the English gentleman who was there very ill.

The host came forward, and answered her with smiles, shrugs and gestures, and a flood of incomprehensible words.

Amethyst stood perplexed. Some men started up from the tables and began to explain, evidently with the best intentions, but with such vehemence of tone and gesture that Miss Haredale clutched her niece's arm, with a terrified conviction that they were all making excuses to stare at Amethyst, who began to make her inquiries in French —when, behind her, a voice that might have been the echo of her own said "Aunt Annabel!"

She turned, and by one of the little tables stood a tall woman, with a slight swaying figure like Una's, a dress incongruously splendid in that squalid place, and a face—the face of one of themselves—not so much older as to have lost all its kindred beauty, but with pale cheeks and painted eyes, and a look at once familiar, as only the

nearest of kin can be, and strange, as of one belonging to another kind of world.

"Blanche!" exclaimed Miss Haredale, "Blanche! can it be you?"

"Oh yes, Aunt Annabel. It is. I am staying here for a little variety, and I saw papa, and Charles—both of them—in the rooms. And I thought I'd better come and look after my brother, when I heard he was ill."

She laughed a little, as she uttered these words in something of Tory's tone when she did the good little girl, an effect heightened by the use of the old-fashioned appellation by which, long, long ago, Lord Haredale's elder children had been wont to call him; but her eyes were on her sister. "Is that Amethyst?" she said. "Ah, you don't remember me."

"Yes, Blanche, I do," said Amethyst; but she had turned deadly pale, for Blanche had been little more than an abstraction to her mind.

"But where is your father?" said Miss Haredale. "And Charles, is he any better?"

"Oh no—nor can be. He's got D. T. and all sorts of other horrors. Just drank himself to death, poor fellow. I can pay the nurse and the doctor: but I can't bear the sight of him. What *was* the good of your coming?"

"Is the nurse trained, my dear? Indeed, I ought to go up," said Miss Haredale.

"Well, I can show you. Perhaps he is asleep. Trained — oh dear no; she's a horrid old woman."

Lady Clyste led the way up-stairs, and, as they followed her, outcries, sounds that made Amethyst's heart die within her, led them on their way.

"Oh, he's quite off his head," said Blanche, as she opened the bed-room door.

There, on the narrow bed, lay Charles; and Amethyst saw what months of neglect and evil living, and frightful ills and sufferings, had made of a man already marred and ruined beyond repair.

Miss Haredale recoiled with a sob, and Amethyst gathered up her courage and came forward.

"Charles," she said.

The sick man started up and swore at her for a ghost. Then his eyes cleared a little, and he stuttered out—

"Amethyst! Oh, d—n it all. Go away; you mustn't stop here, here with *me*. And there's Blanche; you mustn't stay with Blanche. Take her away, Aunt Anna. Take her away this moment."

Blanche gave a sort of laugh, and then began to sob hysterically.

"Hush, Charles," said Amethyst, "I came to see you. You won't hurt me,—and Blanche—is very kind. Lie still.—Una sent you her love."

Her lips and hands trembled a little, but her eyes were full of yearning pity. Never, in her loveliest moments, had she looked as she did now.

She stood by Charles, and laid her hand on his, then glanced from him to his other sister, of whom he had spoken thus.

She looked at this sister, who had loved foolishly, and married unlovingly, and then yielded to the passion that offered a change from the dullness of the world's prosperity, and she thought of herself, and of what so easily might have been her fate; and no longer scorn and hatred, but a deep and awful pity filled her soul for those who had not been saved as she had, and who had been unable to save themselves.

She did not in the least know what to do, however much she might pity, and had turned to the white-capped peasant who was acting as nurse, when there was a rush up-stairs, and the host who had received them dashed into the room and shouted out something in Italian. Blanche, who understood, screamed aloud, and crying out—

"He says my father has had a fit and is brought in—dead," rushed down the stairs, while Miss Haredale, half distracted, followed her, and host and nurse flew to join the fray.

Charles had grasped Amethyst's hand, she thought that he might die at that moment, and dared not leave him. Of what passed in that dreadful hour, when she was left alone with the dying man, she never afterwards spoke. The sun was setting in a fiery glow, and streamed in at the window on to the bed, revealing with the dreadful clearness of a light from heaven, its squalor and wretchedness, and the misery and degradation of him who lay on it.

There was shouting and calling below, and terrible crazy utterances from Charles, mixed now and then with a kindly word, "Una—good girl—poor little Carrie," then frightful visions and fear, oaths and cursing, and over all the approach of the King of Terror in his most awful form.

Amethyst was utterly ignorant and helpless, she could have done little, had she had trained skill. But she stood by and touched him and spoke to him, and uttered prayers that were at first mere outbursts of fear, mere cries for help in her extremity. But gradually they grew conscious and clear, and she prayed for her brother's soul with all her might, and her terror passed away, as he sank into quieter mutterings. She prayed aloud with the instinct of a child, but as the

yearning impulse grew stronger, it found fewer words. She said, "Our Father—Our Father," over and over again, as if she could and need say nothing more, and at last came a weak hoarse echo to her voice.

"Our Father—" muttered Charles, with the last look of his dying eyes fixed on his young sister's beautiful face, on which the last rays of the sunlight fell.

"An angel—down in hell! Our Father—" he said, and then his head fell back, the great change came, and Amethyst saw him die.

"Oh, my dear, I had to leave you; but your father's breathing still. Come down; and here's the doctor, let him see Charles;" and Miss Haredale, pale and shaking, but with composure gained from the very extremity, came into the room, followed by an Italian doctor, who gave one glance at the bed.

"The young lady must not stay here," he said, "there is no more to be done. Nor you either, Signora; Milord will perhaps have need of you."

Miss Haredale gave a little gasp of horror; but she was hardly able to realize anything fresh. She took Amethyst down-stairs to the coffee-room, which had been cleared of all its occupants; while Lord Haredale, who had fallen down in the street, not far from the inn, had been laid on a bed, roughly made up on one of the tables. Two Englishmen, who had some slight acquaintance with him, were there, and had sent for the doctor, and done what they could to help the helpless ladies, and now, one of them, hearing what had happened up-stairs, went to see the doctor and make the first needful arrangements.

Lord Haredale was quite unconscious; there was no chance, the doctor said, of a rally, but it might

not be over for some hours. Lady Clyste sat crouched up by a stove at the end of the room, crying in a violent unrestrained fashion. Miss Haredale sat down by her brother's side, shedding a few tears, but faithfully watching him; while Amethyst, stupefied and silent, stood at the sick man's feet. Presently the other Englishman came back and spoke to her.

"Miss Haredale?" he said, bowing. "My name is Williams. I had the honour of his lordship's acquaintance. You are perhaps hardly aware how quickly arrangements have to be made in this country. And the expense is great. Your brother's funeral, would it be here? Have you friends to consult?"

"Oh, no," exclaimed Miss Haredale, interposing. "Impossible! anything but that. We all lie at Haredale."

Amethyst looked at Mr. Williams, who was not a very prepossessing person; but he was much better than no one, and she decided to trust him.

"I have some money," she said, "but I don't know. We must telegraph to my mother at Bordighera, and, yes—to another friend. But—is there no one here—an English chaplain or clergyman?"

Mr. Williams never appeared to have heard of such an official, but he promised to inquire, and to despatch the telegrams to Lady Haredale, and to Sylvester Riddell, who could surely come for an hour or two and help them in such extremity, then all would be well. Then he departed, promising to do all he could to delay matters till something definite occurred, with a glance at Lord Haredale's heavily-breathing figure.

"Amethyst, Amethyst, do come here," sobbed

Blanche, calling to her. "Is Charles dead? Oh, how awful, how dreadful!—oh, I wish I hadn't come!"

"I think you were quite right to come," said Amethyst, as Blanche came towards her, catching hold of her, and clinging to her with a touch that strangely reminded her of Una's agitated clasp. "Oh, come and sit here, let us talk of something else. Really, there's no reason you shouldn't be with me. Won't they get us something to eat? These Italians are all so frightened when any one's ill."

Amethyst spoke to the old peasant woman, and asked her to fetch them soup or coffee. One trouble had succeeded another so rapidly that she seemed to have no feelings left.

The coffee was brought, and Lady Clyste revived a little as she drank it.

"So you had a great success in London? But why didn't you marry that rich baronet? How pretty you are. Was there anybody else? I think you'd better have married him. Perhaps he wouldn't have been such a jealous tyrant as Sir Edward. That was why I came away. There really wasn't anything wrong; he had his amusements, and so had I."

Amethyst could not answer, and suddenly Blanche changed her tone.

"But didn't I hear that Oliver Carisbrooke was there? Oh, Amethyst, never you have anything to do with him. He was the ruin of me. There, he made me over head and ears in love with him, little, young thing that I was—and then he left me to bear all the blame. I declare, Amethyst, he planned it all, how I was to run away with him, and when he found out my mother's money could be kept away from me, he threw me over. Oh,

and he's tried since. He'd make you believe anything. Being in love amuses him. He does that instead of gambling, or drinking, or being wicked like other men. He gets up an emotion! I hope you don't like him."

"No, I hate him," said Amethyst under her breath.

"I want to hear all about you. Do you get on with my lady? I liked her—she was great fun. But when I was in trouble—ah, how she threw me over! And how she tried to cut me out! I could tell you—"

Amethyst started up, and went over to her father's side. In that presence, with that other awful death-bed fresh in her mind, this idle trifling seemed the most dreadful of all the horrors which she had had to face.

She knelt down by her aunt's side, and laid her face against her shoulder, the child-love of long ago coming to her help; while Miss Haredale pressed her close, and watched in silence.

The hours passed, and there was no arrival from Bordighera, and no message.

Amethyst's heart sank within her. Why did not her mother come?—And surely nothing but the worst trouble at Casa Remi could have kept Sylvester from coming to her help in such extremity.

In the dawn of the morning, without rally or suffering, Lord Haredale died, and, as Amethyst turned to face the chilly light at the opened door, there, with pale face and anxious eyes, stood Sylvester Riddell. She flew to him with outstretched hands.

"Oh, you are here!" she cried, "I have been longing—"

Sylvester clasped her hands close.

"Oh, my dearest," he cried. "It was almost all over last night. They never even gave me your telegram till too late. But he is still alive, and he caught a whisper of your trouble, and his first word was 'Go.' Now, now I can take care of you. How could your mother let you come?"

CHAPTER IX.

PEACE.

THREE days after that night of watching there was a double funeral in the cemetery at Bordighera, and the last Baron Haredale, and the only heir to his title, were laid to rest under a foreign sky, far away from the home they had forfeited; for there was no money to spare for funeral journeys, or for ceremonies at the end of them. Haredale was mortgaged up to its chimney-tops, and the title died with its direct male heirs. There had been no time for more than telegrams from the solicitors in charge of the miserable family affairs; but it was hoped that some provision would be saved out of the wreck for Lady Haredale and her four young daughters.

There was much talk and much scandal among all the English colonies along the Riviera, and the misdeeds of the two last Haredales were whispered in drawing-rooms and discussed in clubs in all quarters. Nevertheless, the subjects of the scandal had been the possessor of, and the heir to, an English peerage, and various gentlemen presented themselves to follow the funeral; while every one looked with pity on the four tall girls, so young

and so handsome, whose condition was all the more forlorn, because they could not really regret the loss either of father or brother.

Miss Haredale wept as much for the fall of her family as for the loss of her brother and nephew; and the white wreath, which Carrie Carisbrooke laid on Charles Haredale's coffin, symbolized the kindliest feeling he had ever inspired. Mr. Riddell arrived in time to conduct the funeral, and, by Lucian's express desire, both his mother and Sylvester left his side to follow it.

Two of the nearest were absent. Lady Haredale would not go, she shut herself into her room overpowered by a real passion, of what kind her daughters could hardly tell,—whether of grief for her husband, nervous fright at the shock of the two sudden deaths, or of chagrin at her changed position.

"You see, I always liked my poor dear lord so much better than any one else, at bottom," she said, with tears, to Amethyst; and then she added, "He was such a protection, I shall have to be so careful in future."

Lady Clyste had fled from the scene of death the moment the watching of that awful night was over. She would not stay, she cried, as if passionately repenting the impulse that had brought her to the spot, and went away from Monte Carlo back to whence she came, so that the brief hours of the night when they had watched together seemed to Amethyst like a vision. They did not know where she lived, or the manner of her life, and she evidently meant to take no part in theirs.

It was not an occasion when plans and intentions could be put off or left untouched upon, and when the funeral was over, the four sisters went out, and sat under the olive trees together and talked over

the future that lay before them,—not without a certain renewal of courage, for was it not far more in their own hands than it had ever been before?

"I suppose we shall be very poor," said Kattern dolefully.

"But we shall know what we have got," said Una, "and then I suppose we can manage accordingly."

"I have quite made up my mind," said Tory. "I don't mean to be a poor swell, with every one afraid of being let in for marrying me. I shall be a teacher. They let me try to take the little ones at St. Ethel's, and I was no end of a success. You see I always knew what the worst were up to. They couldn't astonish *me*. I shall go back there. It won't cost much, and I'll just grind. I should like to go to college if I could afford it, and by and by I'll get a teachership. Then I will live in a lodging, and go on the top of omnibuses, and—owe no man a penny."

"I think St. Etheldred's is very strict and very dull," said Kattern.

"Yes, they're strict, but they mean well. They have got more patience than if they weren't so good," said Tory, astutely. "I believe in Miss Halliday and I'm very interesting to her, I'm such a new type. She'll enjoy training me."

"Have you any thoughts, Una dear?" said Amethyst, speaking for the first time.

"They're a long way ahead," said Una, "for myself, but I wish mother would live at Cleverley. Of course the Hall will be sold, but there's that nice little house not far from the Rectory; perhaps we could take that. I suppose Carrie will get Aunt Anna to live with her at Ashfield Mount, and I do hope we shall have a home and not wander about."

"If I'd had such chances as you and Amethyst," said Kattern, "I'd have had a home fast enough."

"Well, when you've secured one of the Royal Family, we'll settle near you," said Tory, cynically.

She got up as she spoke and walked on, up the hill, with a rapid determined step, while Kattern followed her with her dawdling, graceful tread. Una remained, looking out over the sea; presently she said—

"I have had a letter from Miss Waterhouse; she is so pleased with the work I have done for her. Perhaps some time she'll let me do a little more to help her. I shall try and learn now, that's what I should like."

"Perhaps!" said Amethyst, gently.

"And I shall try and be good with mother," said Una. "You see, *she* was a young girl once, and perhaps things began to go wrong with her then."

It was a strange thought to come into a daughter's mind, but it represented a real impulse in Una's heart, to have patience with the mother who had never had any motherly care for her. Amethyst could make no plans. The terrible night at Monte Carlo had worn her out mind and body, and yet her nerves were quiet and her spirit at rest.

Presently she saw Sylvester coming up the hill, and went quickly forward to meet him.

"Have you come to fetch me?" she said.

"Yes,—if you can bear to come. My father is ready, and Lucy is getting so weak. Will it be too much for you to come to-day?"

"There can be no better day," said Amethyst, as she walked away with him. Sylvester looked very tired and sad. He did not speak till they came near the house, then he looked round at her and said huskily—

"The dear boy has not much more to suffer."

Amethyst silently put her hand in his, and so let him lead her in.

If she had lately seen, in its worst form, the terror of death, what she saw now was indeed "Death as a friend."

The quiet room, full of flowers and subdued light, the preparations for the Holy Feast; Lucian's fair face, white and peaceful.

He looked at Amethyst and smiled, while Mrs. Leigh kissed her and drew her to her side, and at once the service was begun. It was an hour of which Amethyst never spoke, but which she never forgot to her life's end.

When it was over, he made a little sign, and she went up to him, and took his hand, then he smiled again and said—

"Good-bye;" and then—"Say the verse *now*, Amethyst—'amethysts unpriced.'"

And then back upon Amethyst came the memory of the boy lover, whom she had reproved for connecting her name with the hymn of the heavenly city, and told him with girlish propriety, that he ought not to think about her in church.

It thrilled her with a depth of meaning now, and choked her voice, but she managed to repeat it—

> "Thine ageless walls are bonded
> With amethysts unpriced,
> And the saints build up the fabric,
> And the corner-stone is Christ."

"It's true," said Lucian. "Now I understand. Good-bye, Amethyst, give me a kiss."

She kissed him, and this time no flush of pain crossed his face, he smiled once more, so that she saw him, for the last time, smiling and watching her.

* * * * *

That happy smile was never again driven away by cruel pain. The agony with which it had been feared life might end, never came. Lucian kissed his mother, then fell asleep with the peaceful look still on his face, and with his head on Sylvester's arm, and so passed away where there is no more pain, into a peace never to be broken.

"Keep innocency and do the thing that is right, and that shall bring a man peace at the last," said Mr. Riddell; and in due time, the words were cut on the white marble beneath which he rested, in the cemetery at Bordighera.

This had been his own choice, he having, with characteristic directness, told his mother that he should like it best, and that she could put very handsome brasses in the churches at Toppings and Cleverley.

Lucian was at peace, and there was much repose for those who had been watching him, in the sense that all his suffering was ended.

There were loving interviews with Mrs. Leigh, and much talk over Lucian's last hours, almost, on the mother's side, as if there had been no breach of the betrothal. Mrs. Leigh gave Amethyst back the photograph of Lucian as she had first known him, with its perfect outlines, like a Greek masque, and firm, unvarying expression, and another, much more beautiful in Amethyst's eyes, taken during his last illness, with all the forms sharpened and chiselled away, the lines of pain round eyes and mouth, but with the look that made it like the picture of Lucian's soul instead of his body.

Amethyst took them as treasures indeed, but she was the comforter, not the comforted, in the intercourse with Lucian's mother, for the admiration of him was sweeter to her than the loss was sad.

Then came a great surprise, the bequest from Lucian of £5,000, "as a token that if I could, I would have given her all I possess."

The codicil to his will was dated after he had given her back her ring, and Mrs. Leigh told her that he had often thought of it, but had not ventured to do it till she had once more given him the right, and that he had said that he wished her to have her life in her own hands.

Then she knew that he had fully understood her difficulties, and what a difference independence might make to her. One thing that she had dreaded was saved her.

Carrie Carisbrooke wrote so clear a history to her uncle of the appearance of Lady Clyste at Monte Carlo, that he made no attempt to see Amethyst again; but wrote that he would meet his niece on business matters when she returned to England, and Amethyst was saved from an interview, of which she could only think with a shudder of horror.

Lucian was buried on a still, bright day, when the spring seemed to have made a great advance, and the air was warm and sweet. Amethyst went out on the hill afterwards and sat down in her favourite place among the olive woods, and presently Sylvester came and joined her. He was pale and anxious, though his eyes were bright and eager.

"I have brought this to show you," he said gravely, taking out a little Russia-leather pocket-book, worn and shabby

"It was Lucy's," he said, sitting down by her side. "He kept it as long as he could, and then one day, he pushed it into my hand, and told me to look at it—afterwards."

The pocket-book contained old dates as to the

starting of trains and steamers, records of the slaughter of tigers and elephants, little notes of matters to be attended to on the estate at Toppings. In the pocket was a little old photograph of Amethyst, and a note asking him to come over and play tennis, dated in the second week of her acquaintance with him, and never returned with the "love letters" written afterwards. Sylvester showed her these relics in silence, then he turned to the blank pages at the end of the book on which was written in faint broken characters, very different from the small distinct writing of the earlier entries—

"DEAR SYL,—I want to thank you for nursing me, and for 'Iris.' It showed me how to love her. Don't *wait* to take care of her. She wants you now. It is all quite right, and makes me happy.

"Your old friend,

"LUCY."

Sylvester watched her read with trembling intentness, then he sank on his knee by her side.

"Oh, Amethyst!" he said, "you know—you always have known. You understand—you know these words almost break my heart, and yet fill it with happiness. Oh, my dearest, we have known this long time. Will you let him give you to me *now?*"

"No," said Amethyst, "for—for he knew that I did not belong to him. But I will give myself, and—and oh, help me to be worthy of the love he gave me."

"Help you? Oh, my love, is it possible that you love me? I have hoped it—half believed it—but now it seems beyond belief."

'Oh," said Amethyst with full conviction, "I

never could have given all my love to any one else in the world! I can be good with you!"

* * * * *

"There is one thing I must tell you," said Sylvester, when at last they were sitting side by side and talking more quietly; "you know I have never had enough work to fill up my life. Whatever other men have made of my position, I have taken it easy. Now, through friends at Oxford, I have been asked to undertake the head-mastership of a new public school, which is going to be started in the Midlands. It will be a great concern, and will have to be organized, and begun from the very beginning. I used to talk over the first idea of it with some of the men interested; and that, and my degree, have, I suppose, led them to think of me. It would be hard anxious work, and out of society; but it is a great opening, and —is it utterly throwing you away, to think of taking you there?"

"Oh," cried Amethyst, eagerly, "I should like it. I like work; I would help you all I can. Last year I had quite made up my mind that I would take to teaching myself. I think it would be delightful to begin and see everything grow and prosper. Nothing can be too different from what I have known lately."

Her eyes shone and her lips smiled. Her strong young spirits sprang up once more, and she looked ready indeed for the stir of life.

"There comes my father—" said Sylvester. "Father; she will!"

Mr. Riddell took Amethyst in his arms and kissed her tenderly, then dropped a kiss on his son's brow, and pressed his hand.

"So," he said with a smile, "Iris is won. Now, my children, look for the Heavenly vision together. They were very pretty verses, Syl, with some genuine stuff in them, and I have read them over several times with much pleasure."

"They have been honoured above their desert," said Sylvester, speaking low, and thinking of Lucian's words.

There is little more to say. The plan sketched out in the four sisters' conversation took shape. Lady Haredale lived at Cleverley, and marvellously accommodated herself to the life there expected of her.

Mrs. Leigh and her daughters came back to Ashfield Mount; for Carrie Carisbrooke's fortune did not come intact out of her uncle's hands, and she preferred to settle herself with Miss Haredale at Silverfold.

Tory went to school and began her career of independence. Kattern became the star of the Cleverley country, and some people thought her "more pleasing than the beauty, if not so handsome." If she has chances, she will probably be able to use them.

And Una waited. No one's story is all told at eighteen, no one's trials are over so early. But she will always be one of those who stretch out helping hands to others, whether she remains solitary, or whether her heart awakens to new hopes. Her life will never be without struggle, but the battle each time will be fought on higher and higher ground. And Amethyst and Sylvester went into a world of great, numerous, and wholesome interests, in which they took their parts nobly, and were more and more helpmeets to each other, as Amethyst's story ran on to its close.

The Haredale amethysts disappeared for ever in the crash of the family fortunes. But Lucian's ring was the symbol of a memory that will guard Amethyst till she becomes indeed a jewel in that Heavenly City, to which he is gone before.

THE END.

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